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Enacting Knowledge:
Spinoza's Dynamic of Politics

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Abstract

The central claims of my thesis are that Spinoza's philosophy of mind and affect entails that human knowledge is distinctively creative; and that understanding this makes it possible to understand Spinoza's political philosophy as grounded in the interplay between knowing and the effects of knowledge. I develop the arguments underpinning these claims to show that the tensions commonly perceived in Spinoza's political philosophy are a manifestation of its dynamism and creativity.

The first part of my thesis proposes that, within Spinoza's metaphysics, individual modes should be understood as distinguished by their effects on other modes, rather than by essence. I proceed from this interpretive premise to an explication of Spinoza's theory of knowledge: situating it within the philosophy of mind adumbrated in Part 2 of the *Ethics*, I develop a reading of Spinoza's epistemology as a theory of 'affective knowing'. I argue that his account of knowledge formation implies a necessary interdependence among the three kinds of knowledge discussed in *E2p40s2*, with all knowledge shaped by both the knower's encounters with other modes and her own acting. A significant implication of this interpretation is that in Spinoza's philosophy the political is never static but is constantly created, reinterpreted and re-formed. I show that my interpretation of Spinoza's theory of knowledge may be used as a framework to resolve problems identified in secondary literature on Spinoza's political philosophy, by showing that the tensions within it are productive rather than problematic. I conclude that Spinoza's philosophy generates a situated normativity for politics without recourse to narratives of governmental legitimacy.

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Abbreviations

Works by Spinoza

<i>E</i>	<i>Ethics (Ethica)</i>
<i>Ep</i>	<i>The Letters (Epistola)</i>
<i>TIE</i>	<i>Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect (Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione)</i>
<i>TP</i>	<i>Political Treatise (Tractatus Politicus)</i>
<i>TTP</i>	<i>Theological-Political Treatise (Tractatus Theologico-Politicus)</i>

Unless otherwise stated, quotations of Spinoza's works are from Edwin Curley's *The Collected Works of Spinoza, Volumes I* (1985) *Volume II* (2016).

References to the *Ethics* are in the format e.g. *E2p40s1* and use the following abbreviations:

E1, E2 etc. = part
a = axiom
App = appendix
c = corollary
d = definition
Def.Aff. = Definitions of the Affects
Exp = explanation
L = lemma
n = note
p = proposition
post = postulate
Pref = preface
s = scholium

References to the *TTP* denote the chapter and paragraph numbers (Curley translation) and are in the format e.g. *TTP16[8]*.

References to the *TP* denote the chapter and paragraph numbers and are in the format e.g. *TP2.6*.

References to the *TIE* denote paragraph numbers from the Curley translation and are in the format e.g. *TIE§16*.

Works by Descartes

<i>Med</i>	<i>Meditations on First Philosophy</i> (References are in the format e.g. <i>Med 1</i>)
<i>PS</i>	<i>Passions of the Soul</i> (References to Articles in are in the format e.g. <i>PS§1</i>)
<i>Pr</i>	<i>Principles of Philosophy</i> (References are in the format e.g. <i>PrII.14</i>)

Introduction

Spinoza declares in the concluding chapter of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* that the purpose of the state is really freedom (*TTP*20[12]). True freedom, he proposes, consists in people¹ being able to follow ways of life in which they use their reason, avoid unnecessary conflict with one another and treat each other fairly. According to Spinoza, the state is the context in which people are most free (*E*4p73); it is therefore perhaps unsurprising that interpretations of Spinoza's political philosophy have been oriented around questions of whether his political analysis and prescriptions are indeed commensurate with freedom, and how the civic freedoms of the state relate to the human freedom which is the subject matter of Part 5 of the *Ethics*. My thesis is motivated by the existence of divergent strands in the interpretation of Spinoza's political philosophy, between those commentators who emphasise the relative ontological standing of the state and of people and those who read the political works through the lens of Spinoza's epistemology. Each of these strands can be illuminating in its own right; my concern is that the differences in orientation threaten to lose the force of Spinoza's political philosophy by sidestepping its grounding in the holistic system of the *Ethics*. I aim to take steps towards remedying this interpretive dilemma by proposing that, for Spinoza, knowing – the way in which people form the ideas that they do, and how they make use of those ideas – is importantly constitutive both of the shared ways of life cultivated within social formations and political systems and of the people who live within those systems. My thesis therefore moves to close the gap between ontological and epistemological perspectives, by exploring how ontology and epistemology work together in Spinoza's philosophy. I argue for an interpretation of Spinoza's political writings as embedded in a dynamic of knowing and being.

¹ In this thesis I take Spinoza's references to 'men' usually to refer to human beings; this seems most consistent with his philosophical system and arguments, despite his treatment of women in the notorious final chapter of the *Tractatus Politicus*.

The theme of dynamics is present in much Spinoza scholarship, in treatments of the metaphysics of the *Ethics* as well as the political works². However, both the operation of the apparent dynamic at work in Spinoza's political writings and the philosophical foundation of that dynamic are under-explored. In this thesis, I seek to establish that the dynamic present in Spinoza's philosophy is actual, rather than metaphorical; and that it operates in the same way throughout his system, from the formation and persistence of complex bodies to the constitution of political entities and the particular ways of life they cultivate. On this reading of Spinoza's political writings, a state constitutes and enacts some way of life which sets parameters within which people understand and can reimagine freedom. Thus political freedom always stands at the horizon of a dynamic between state and people; and the proper task of politics is to navigate that horizon, ensuring that the security required for people to exercise their existing understanding of freedom does not compromise their ability to revise and extend that understanding.

In Chapter 1 I consider relevant secondary literature, drawing out the problems I wish to resolve by examining the strengths and limitations of both ontological and epistemological approaches to interpreting Spinoza's political philosophy. I argue that commentators who address the political works through questions of the ontological standing of the state are seemingly unable to avoid giving ontological priority to either individual people or to the state itself, and that this leads to a polarisation of interpretive perspectives between political individualism and political collectivism. I suggest that this polarisation is reflective more of the concerns of the commentators themselves than of Spinoza's philosophy, and that it leads to an impasse in which Spinoza's political writings are contested, rather than illuminated, by contemporary philosophers. I then consider the work of commentators who read Spinoza's political work through the lens of epistemology rather than ontology, arguing that such interpretations are better placed to address questions of relations between states and peoples, and the cultivation of freedom within the state. I suggest that

² With regard to the metaphysics, see for example Deleuze (1992); Viljanen (2007); with regard to the political writings, see for example Balibar (2008); Sharp (2009; 2011).

the epistemological approach nonetheless has limitations in (explicitly or tacitly) confining the political to the domain of imagination, thus implicitly separating Spinoza's political writings from the system of the *Ethics*. It is this limitation which I seek to overcome in my thesis by demonstrating that the political is created and constituted by reason, and indeed by *scientia intuitiva*, as much as by imagination.

In Chapter 2 I argue that, notwithstanding the limitations of the ontological strand of interpretation, the question of identity and individuation among modes is important for an appreciation of Spinoza's political philosophy. I situate my project within Deleuze's interpretation of Spinoza's philosophy as expressionist but move beyond Deleuze to argue that all ideas, including inadequate ones, are expressive. Modes *qua* complex individual things are differentiated in the effects they bring about, rather than in essence; the effects which are distinctive of any particular mode are brought about in virtue of their inadequate ideas, that is, the ideas they form in encounters with other modes. Thus the expression which individuates a mode is at once distinctive of that very mode and expressive of its relations with other modes. This has the further consequence that a mode's distinctive expression of substance is also dependent on its receptivity to encounters with other modes, that is, on its passivity as well as its activity.

The significance of receptivity is developed in Chapter 3 in the context of Spinoza's theory of the affects. I show that the phenomena of human affect addressed in Part 3 of the *Ethics* are not simply manifestations of bodily affections; rather, they are inadequate ideas which people form by actions of their minds and, as such, involve expression through their receptivity and responses. Underlying these named affects are increases or decreases in the person's power of acting; I reaffirm Spinoza's text at *E3d3* to argue that, properly speaking, affect refers to the increase or decrease in power, rather than the set of inadequate ideas comprising the named affects. I use this principle to argue for a non-teleological understanding of *conatus* under which a mode's power increases or decreases only in response to certain encounters with other modes: other things equal, the mode's power continues in a steady state. Affect *simpliciter* marks an encounter which impacts on a mode's power of acting;

striving to persist in being involves acting in response to such encounters. On this basis, I argue that what is distinctive about any mode's *conatus* is entirely determined by the encounters it undergoes and their effect on it, including its responses. This dispenses with the need for any notion of teleology in understanding the operation of *conatus* in Spinoza's philosophy. Further, affect *qua* response can be seen to mark the shift between the mind's continuous perception of every affection of the body (E2p12) and the mind's awareness³ of some sub-set of those affections. Affect deflects *conatus*, giving the mind occasion to form ideas of its encounters and to make use of them in striving.

If affect is a feature of all encounters of which a mode is aware, then knowledge in human beings must be affective. In Chapters 4 and 5 I develop a reading of Spinoza's theory of knowledge in which the distinctions among three kinds of knowledge at E2p40s2 are of conceptual rather than epistemological significance: the classification serves as a heuristic to clarify Spinoza's philosophy to his (philosophical) readers, while the key epistemological distinction is that between adequate and inadequate ideas. From Spinoza's philosophy of mind I conclude that, as embodied human beings, all our ideas are hybrids of adequate and inadequate ideas and therefore also hybrids of imagination, reason and *scientia intuitiva*. On this basis, I propose that the epistemology of the *Ethics* marks a shift in Spinoza's philosophy, away from conceiving of knowledge as a quest for perfection in ideas and towards a theorising of the activity of knowing and its place in human life. I argue that our knowing is irreducibly affective in virtue of both our inadequate and our adequate ideas; I show further that the conceptual separation of idea, as formed by one's mind, and affect, marking a shift in one's power of acting, is essential to Spinoza's epistemology. On this basis, knowing can be understood as a dynamic between our receptivity and responses to encounters and our affective epistemic commitments, played out in our *conatus*. Thus knowing is a manifestation of human striving and the ineliminable presence of inadequate ideas in our knowledge claims, far from compromising the enterprise of philosophy, makes

³ I do not claim that such awareness is conscious; this important point is elaborated in Chapter 3.

methodology and systematicity in our thinking all the more significant. I conclude Chapter 5 by arguing that the hybrid of adequate and inadequate content in our ideas gives human thought a distinctive transformative and creative character: affective knowing is both situated in our specific circumstances and developmental or expansive, with the resources to respond innovatively to the encounters we have by bringing about effects such as artefacts, myths and relationships. In other words, knowing is an intrinsic element in human beings' capacity for bringing about transformative effects⁴.

With the components of expression, receptivity and affective knowing in play, Chapter 6 argues that the transformational effects which can be brought about in affective knowing provide a basis for human beings to extend and increase their power, systematically and cumulatively. Achieving such durable gains in power requires joining and acting with others, notably through bringing about social or political formations. Thus human beings increase and extend their power by enacting their *inadequate* ideas of encounters and affects, and such formations always bear the traces of those encounters and affects. Living within social or political formations in turn engenders new kinds of encounters with other people and things, which generate further effects, and so forth. In other words, dynamic processes of encounter, receptivity and response take place among modes, whether social formations, people or things, generating successive reconstitutions of and shifts in power. This is the process which prompts Spinoza to identify the state as the locus for the emergence and development of human freedom.

Chapter 6 establishes that the state in Spinoza's political philosophy is an arena for the playing out of a dynamic of affective knowing; in Chapter 7 I develop this proposal further, drawing on the resource of expression through inadequate ideas as distinctive of modes, to explain how the dynamic between state and people works out in Spinoza's distinctive understanding of politics. I contend that the state stands as an individual in its own right within Spinoza's

⁴ Spinoza's philosophy of mind entails that this must be true of other modes, not only human beings. Nonetheless, the effects of human beings' knowing can be distinctive and characteristic of them, as I argue in Chapter 2.

system, expressing *potentia* in its inadequate ideas and indeed its affective responses; I argue, however, that it is neither necessary nor useful to raise questions of ontological priority between states and the people living within them. The fact that a state and individual people, or groups of people, or its population in its entirety, may find themselves in conflict is no reason to posit ontological priority, along with a corresponding implication of ethical precedence, for one entity or another; nor is the fact that a state may demonstrably enhance the power and freedom of people. Rather, any entity stands *qua* mode in Spinoza's metaphysics, and what is of political or ethical interest is the interplay of expressed *potentia* among distinguishable entities.

The *potentia* of a state, like that of any individual, reflects its history: the inadequate ideas and affectivity bound up in its origins and encounters, including encounters with and among people living within it. As such, the *potentia* of a state is neither identical with nor parasitic on the aggregate *potentia* of its people. Rather, it is an effect continuously created by their inadequate ideas about how and how far there are benefits achievable through cooperation, or through compliance with the requirements of a common way of life. A state's *potentia* thus necessarily extends less widely than that of its people: at any point in time, there are gains in *potentia* to be won from reimagining the state in the right ways. While the state is indeed a mode in its own right, like other modes it is a necessarily partial and provisional entity.

At the same time the state is a standing means of creating new *potentia*, that is, of extending people's power, provided that the dynamics of affective knowing within the state and between the state and its people operate positively so as to generate the optimism of joyful affects in general and the confidence generated by affects of reason in particular. I show how Spinoza's account of the Hebrew state and its downfall may be read as illustrating the dynamic between state *potentia* and the *potentia* of people which arises from affective knowing; and I argue that one consequence of this dynamic is that, notwithstanding their non-identity, state *potentia* and the aggregated *potentia* of people are necessarily concurrent, rather than opposed. I use this insight to defuse some of the philosophical concerns about Spinoza's political works articulated in the

secondary literature. I argue that tensions between right and power are not a weakness in Spinoza's treatment of politics, but rather are built into the existence of the state *qua* expression of perceived and partial agreements in nature among those who live within it. When the limits of such perceptions and partiality are revealed, such as in situations of rebellion, this offers occasion for enhancing the *potentia* both of the state and of people, if all parties are able to respond in the right way. There is no guarantee of an optimal outcome, given that the nature of such occasions is of modes being affected so as to form inadequate ideas of other modes and their effects; this does not compromise my interpretation, the point of which is to show that the tensions in Spinoza's political philosophy are a manifestation of the working out of expression among modes, and not a theoretical flaw.

I conclude Chapter 7 by showing how my analysis and exposition of the dynamics of the state in Spinoza's system extends and improves on other recent interpretations of his political writings, notably by demonstrating that his political philosophy can be understood without recourse to contested questions of collective agency. I reiterate the importance of interpretations of Spinoza which highlight the significance of his epistemology for revealing his political philosophy as manifesting a radicalism which avoids either idealism or dogmatism. I argue, further, that Spinoza's political philosophy is not confined to a methodological prescription aimed only at correct understanding: the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* and the *Tractatus Politicus* contain principles which are both universalised and strongly normative. I argue that, where such principles occur in Spinoza's philosophy, they are best elucidated by regarding the state as an existent mode, striving to persevere and increase its power in facilitating recognition of agreement in nature among its constituent modes, on the one hand, and in increasing the actual extent of that agreement, on the other. The normativity appropriate to political philosophy, on Spinoza's account, neither constrains nor legitimates particular exercises of governmental power; rather, it provides the basis for judging such exercises of power on their success in bringing about extensions of human freedom.

Chapter 1

Spinoza's Political Thought: Interpretive Controversies

In reading interpretations of and commentaries upon Spinoza's political philosophy, one is struck by a dichotomy between perspectives that are, broadly speaking, either individualist or collectivist in orientation. And despite some attempts at reconciling the two or building bridges between them, the two camps persist, pursuing largely different projects in pursuit of the significance of the works of a single philosopher. The persistence of this dichotomy ought to alert us to the possibility that both camps have Spinoza wrong.

It might be that the divergence of views is simply a symptom of Spinoza's philosophy giving rise to different currents of thought in our own time. It is perfectly possible to conceive that the writings of a seventeenth-century philosopher should provide fertile ground for developments in twentieth and twenty-first century philosophy. Indeed, some philosophers openly do just that, citing Spinoza as a source of inspiration and orientation for their own thinking¹. However, in the bodies of work that I shall consider in this chapter, philosophers on each side of the dichotomy seem to lay claim to *interpreting* Spinoza, not making use of his ideas in their own philosophical-political contexts. And if these writings are interpretations of Spinoza, then it seems that the existence of a seemingly irreconcilable difference of view as to the meaning of the political works should prompt us to revisit the justifications of those interpretations.

Alternatively, it could be that developments in political philosophy, and indeed in the conduct of politics, provide us with new perspectives on Spinoza and new ways of reading his philosophy. Indeed, this seems unavoidably to be the case. It would be rare today to find a philosopher prepared to endorse openly

¹ Examples are Naess (1989); Hardt and Negri (2005); O'Sullivan (2006); Bennett (2010); Dennis 2017

Spinoza's pronouncements on women in Chapter XI of the *Tractatus Politicus*, whereas various interpretations², including but not exclusively those of feminist philosophers, have explicitly drawn attention to potential ways of interpreting that chapter as variously consistent with, contrary to or tangential to the overall direction of his philosophy. Even those philosophers whose work is inspired by aspects of Spinoza's own writings – his apparent endorsement of democracy, or his attitudes to the actions of the multitude, or the implications for globalisation of a holistic reading of his philosophy – are unlikely to make the strong claim that what they take from Spinoza was deliberately written into his text from the start. But again, the more philosophical, and highly influential, mainstream commentators all aim at correct understandings of what Spinoza himself wrote. And given two divergent and seemingly irreconcilable strands of such attempts, we have the choice between opting for one or the other, or revisiting Spinoza's political philosophy works in search of a line of interpretation which can shed light on both the philosophy itself and its widely divergent effects on his readers.

In this chapter I shall first indicate how Spinoza's political writings challenge our own political sensibilities, exhibiting profound tensions: between narratives of democracy and absolutism, and between a picture of irreducibly unruly humanity on the one hand and genuinely unifying projects of reason on the other. I shall examine some recent influential attempts, both individualist and collectivist, to resolve these challenges. I shall propose that the differences between them are grounded in their giving priority to Spinoza's substance/mode ontology over other important aspects of his philosophy. The dichotomy is therefore a symptom of incompleteness in consideration of Spinoza's political writings, with the consequence that interpretations on either side offer an impoverished version of Spinoza's thought. I shall move on to look at interpretations which attempt to break down the individualist-collectivist dichotomy, and show that what these interpretations share is a methodological shift, from a primary focus on questions of ontology to exploration of the resonances of Spinoza's theory of knowledge in his political philosophy. Finally, I

² Some examples may be found in Sharp (2012, 2009); Lord (2011); Gatens (2009a); Mathéron (2009).

shall show that there are good reasons to prefer the latter class of interpretations, on the grounds that they give a reading of the political works which is both richer and more fully embedded in the philosophy of the *Ethics*. This sets the scene for my own project of investigating how knowledge constitutes and creates the political in Spinoza's philosophy.

1. Spinoza's Challenge: the Purpose and Foundations of the State

Even in his political works, Spinoza does not offer us a straightforward philosophy of the state. His arguments can be elusive and seemingly contradictory, and it is often unclear whether he is articulating a perspective of his own thought, or playing out the consequences of some potential theory in order to undermine it. But he is uncharacteristically direct in giving the purpose of the state:

...not to act as a despot, to restrain men by fear, and to make them subject to someone else's control, but on the contrary to free each person from fear, so that he may live securely, as far as possible, i.e., so that he may retain to the utmost his natural right to exist and act without harm to himself or anyone else. The end of the State, I say, is not to change men from rational beings into beasts or automata, but rather that their mind and body should perform all their functions safely, that they should use their reason freely, and that they should not contend with one another in hatred, anger or deception, or deal unfairly with one another. So the end of the State is really freedom. (*TTP*20[11]-[12])

Further, he is very clear about the advantage, and indeed necessity, of human beings living in political communities: that people require help from each other in order to provide themselves with the means to live (*E4p*35s; *E4p*37s2), and that they are by nature useful to each other (*Ep*35c1; *E4App*IX). Indeed, Spinoza ridicules the possibility of attempting to live outside society:

...those who know how to find fault with men, to castigate vices rather than teach virtues, and to break men's minds rather than strengthen them – they are burdensome both to themselves and to others. That is why many, from too great an impatience of mind, and a false zeal for religion, have preferred to live among the lower animals rather than

among men. They are like boys or young men who cannot bear calmly the scolding of their parents, and take refuge in the army. (E4AppXIII)

Yet Spinoza has no idealistic view of human beings and their capacities. On the contrary, while one of the primary functions of the state cited above is to enable people to 'use their reason fully', the messy reality is that people are driven by affects or passions which constantly threaten the achievement of this goal:

...everyone, by the highest right of Nature, judges what is good and what is evil, considers his own advantage according to his own temperament (see P19 and P20), avenges himself (see IIP40C2) and strives to preserve what he loves and destroy what he hates (see IIP28). If men lived according to the guidance of reason, everyone would possess this right of his (by P35C1) without any injury to anyone else. But because they are subject to the affects (by P4C), which far surpass man's power, or virtue (by P6), they are often drawn in different directions (by P33) and are contrary to one another... (E4p37s2)

The resolution of this tension, between the potential for the state to deliver a better life and the turbulent reality of human behaviour and interactions, presents an obvious challenge for Spinoza's political philosophy: how can the state be constituted so as to both constrain and free the people who live within it? And the tension is only exacerbated by Spinoza's stipulations on the nature of the state. Within an exposition of the state as contract, he argues that sovereignty is necessarily absolute:

In this way, then, a social order can be formed without any conflict with natural right, and every contract can always be preserved with supreme reliability: if each person transfers all the power he has to the social order, which alone will retain the supreme right of nature over all things, i.e., the sovereignty, which each person will be bound to obey, either freely, or from fear of the supreme punishment. (TTP16[25])

Following Hobbes, Spinoza postulates that the state comes about through individuals transferring their natural right as part of a process of contracting or agreeing to live together. But Spinoza is adamant that such a transfer of right cannot be partial: natural right includes an individual's right to choose their own advantage and therefore to break with any contract in the event that the contract

ceases to please them, so that individuals retaining natural right would in effect have the right to ignore and break laws at whim. Moving beyond Hobbes' concession that individuals retain the right of self-defence, Spinoza concludes that:

...the supreme power is bound by no law, but everyone must obey it with respect to everything. For everyone had to contract to this, either tacitly or explicitly, when they transferred to the supreme power all their power of defending themselves, i.e., all their right. If they wished to keep anything for themselves, they ought at the same time to have taken precautions, so that they could defend it safely; but since they did not do that, and could not do it without dividing, and consequently, destroying sovereignty, they thereby submitted themselves absolutely to the will of the supreme power. (*TTP*16[26]-[27])

To live within a state, therefore, demands that one agrees to uphold and comply with all of its laws – whatever they may be. As Spinoza puts it:

...unless we want to be enemies of the state, and to act contrary to reason, which urges us to defend the state with all our powers, we are bound to carry out absolutely all the commands of the supreme power, even though it commands the greatest absurdities. (*TTP*16[27])

Although Spinoza indicates various prudential considerations that may constrain governments – a fear of rebellion, or of inability to enforce its laws (*TTP*16[28]); involvement of large numbers or a diverse range of participants in the very process of government (*TTP*16[30]; also *TP*6&7); the practical impossibility of legislating over thoughts (*TTP*20[2-3]) – these do not bear on his argument for the absolute nature of sovereignty and the absolute requirement of obedience to the state's laws. So the tension remarked earlier, between the state's purpose of achieving a better life for people and people's inclination to go their own way, is seemingly resolved by conferring an unconditional legitimacy on all of the actions of the state. Unsurprisingly, the apparent discrepancy between this absolutist vision and the claim that the purpose of the state is freedom has given rise to much unease about Spinoza's political philosophy which is reflected in the diverse range of interpretations seeking to resolve the unease or to defuse the underlying tensions. In what follows, I shall examine some influential readings of

Spinoza: those in the first group seek a solution in Spinoza's ontology and the relative standing of different kinds of individuals, while those in the second focus on Spinoza's epistemology.

2. The Ontology of People and States – Composition and Precedence

Interpretations of Spinoza's political writings which ground their arguments in the ontological relation between individuals and the state tend to fall into two camps, very different in their assumptions and orientation. The first effectively take the autonomous human individual as a starting point and argue that Spinoza's absolutist account of sovereignty suggests that state power represents an intrinsic potential threat to the freedom of those who live under its governance, notwithstanding his protestations about the purpose of the state being to enhance freedom; such interpretations vary in the extent to which they understand the state as delivering positive outcomes for those who live within it. The second, while recognising the thought that there are insuperable tensions between states and the individual people who live within them, seek to interrogate Spinoza's insistence that the purpose of the state is freedom by exploring the sense in which individuals can be said to constitute the state, and the implications of this for the ability of individuals and states to exercise their respective powers.

Until relatively recently, there was a tendency for commentators in the individualist mode to read Spinoza's political writings as essentially expressing a Hobbesian social contract theory under which the most important questions were those concerning the relation of the individual to the state, and especially how much freedom the individual enjoys under Spinoza's theory of the state. Such readings generally followed Berlin (1958) in arguing that Spinoza's philosophy threatens political liberty, in that it has insufficient safeguards against state intervention or interference in how individuals choose to live their lives. Thus readers such as McShea (1968), Den Uyl (1983) and Rice (1986) have characterised Spinoza as simply an early proponent of liberal individualism, with an intrinsic distrust of the state and a corresponding concern with checks and balances, prefiguring Enlightenment liberal political theories. More recently,

Curley (1996) opened the way for a more nuanced individualist reading of Spinoza's political writings, showing that, contrary to the arguments of the libertarians, Spinoza is at best an "eccentric Hobbesian" (p316) and that his "marked preference for democracy" (p317) is grounded in arguments to the effect that democratic political processes are closer to nature, rather than in a *prima facie* preference for a particular style of institutional arrangement. Curley locates the source of tensions in Spinoza's political philosophy in the 'disturbing thesis' that the right of each thing extends as far as its power, which threatens to strip the concept of right of any normative force that could constrain the actions of governments in exercising the power of the state.

As a counter to the 'disturbing thesis', Curley mobilises Spinoza's repeated appeals to the desirability for human beings of living according to the dictates of reason, arguing that this gives Spinoza the resources to distinguish between legitimate and non-legitimate exercises of state power. An oppressive exercise of state power which generates a situation of destabilisation or revolution may be within the right of the state and of those who govern, but it fails the test of reason: it undermines the state itself, and is therefore self-defeating. In Curley's example, "to say that Genghis Khan acts in accordance with natural right is compatible with saying that he acts contrary to the laws of reason" (p322). The social contract outlined in Chapter 16 of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* should therefore be understood as bringing about a state in which "rulers govern with right just to the extent that their subjects consent to their rule by obeying their commands" (p326). Curley thus interprets Spinoza as appealing to an inbuilt normative constraint on the state's constitutional and legal arrangements, to the effect that they should mirror this retention of individuals' natural right on pain of endangering the state by introducing a source of conflict between its powers and the power of those who live within its jurisdiction.

Curley concludes that, under Spinoza's philosophy, individuals do indeed accept a curb on their freedom as the price of living in the state; but their (natural) right to reflect on the ways of life available to them within the state, and to indicate dissent through speech and actions, remains unaffected by this acceptance. The dictates of reason demand of the good state that its laws and

institutions should acknowledge that natural right and find ways of enhancing the ways in which people may express criticism and dissent peacefully. Nonetheless, Curley shares with earlier individualist commentators a scepticism about whether the dictates of reason do in fact provide a sufficiently robust constraint on the state: “that the notion of natural right (not coextensive with power) disappears in Spinoza seems to me still to be a defect in his political philosophy” (p335). The tacit assumption of this reading is that living in the state amounts to an infringement of individuals’ freedom or self-determination, and the central question for Spinoza’s political philosophy is that of establishing legitimacy, or why and to what extent this infringement can be justified. In Curley’s view, Spinoza falls short of being able to provide a systematic means of identifying when the line of legitimacy is crossed and the state becomes oppressive rather than offering its people greater freedom.

Still in the individualist mould, Della Rocca (2008) argues that the problems Curley sees in Spinoza’s account of the state are due to his underestimating the reach of the provision that to live in the state is to live according to the dictates of reason, and seeking a further, transcendental standard against which the actions of governments may be judged. In contrast, Della Rocca appeals to Spinoza’s contention in *EIApp* that all judgement and evaluation should be referred to power and essence, and to Spinoza’s commitment to the principle of sufficient reason, to argue that “Rightness is just power, just intelligibility...reason dictates that I act so as to increase my power” (p177). This is sufficient to deliver sociability and to underpin both the rightness and the advantage of living in the state, in that “the more it is true both that you and I agree in nature and that you are rational, the more your actions also benefit me” (p178).

Under Della Rocca’s reading, then, Spinoza puts forward a version of the Hobbesian social contract in which reason underpins social organisation on the basis of an explicit understanding among individuals:

I agree to lay down my rights against you, and you similarly agree to lay down your rights against me. We both agree to transfer these rights to a sovereign... Because I have agreed, at least some others will, in return,

stop seeking to harm me, and because I have agreed, the sovereign will in return endeavour to protect me from others who might seek to harm me... (2010, pp180-181)

The contract is not the end of the story, however: the understanding so concluded and the fact of living together under this contract have the effect of creating a further similarity among those who have entered into the bargain – the similarity of being party to the bargain, of accepting its terms, and of standing in a relation of contract to the state. Della Rocca thus retains a picture of autonomous individuals whose co-existence constitutes the state just insofar as (and no further than) the state expresses the similarities among them. Then, their living together according to the dictates of reason gives rise to further such similarities, which themselves create new grounds for obeying the law, since our obedience reinforces our similarities and therefore increases our own power, as well as that of the state and our fellow citizens. Della Rocca goes further:

Spinoza can be seen as trying to get us to take a broader state-oriented perspective, instead of remaining locked in our narrow individual-human-sized points of view. The assessment of actions from the broader state-oriented perspective is more rational than the assessment from the narrower perspective. (2010, p190)

In other words, Della Rocca sees Spinoza's political philosophy as one in which reason binds individuals into the state, not in virtue of some particular feature of reason *per se* but because exercising one's reason enables one to extend one's perspective to the collective as a means of increasing one's own power.

It is far from clear, however, that Della Rocca's interpretation enables him to read Spinoza as successfully addressing the question of how the state can be said to deliver freedom. For even if individuals constitute the state only on the basis of their pursuit of what is right for them – and Della Rocca explicitly characterises this as an iterative process of bargaining and evaluation of the bargain – the argument that reason involves taking on the state-oriented perspective in addition to one's own seems likely to exacerbate, rather than resolve, the putative tension between individual citizens and the state. To begin with, if rightness just is power and intelligibility in the form of reason, as Della

Rocca claims, and if the perspective of the state is, *ex hypothesi*, more rational than the perspective of any single individual, then it seems that in any conflict between the two, right will of necessity be on the side of the state; on Della Rocca's picture, the dissenting individual fails to live according to the dictates of reason, because she fails to take on the perspective of the state. In this situation, freedom appears to require not only obedience to the state's laws but also wholehearted agreement with them, if one is to be considered rational. Even worse, it seems likely that the purported greater rationality of the state's perspective could effectively silence criticism of the state from among its own people. If reason demands that citizens must incorporate the state's perspective into their judgements, then it must also be the case that the critical perspective of the citizen loses out in terms of rationality to that of the state itself. Thus the imperative to see things from the point of view of the state in effect rules out the possibility of rational criticism of the state; in doing so, it also validates actions of the state as rational and therefore justified. In pressing the enhanced rationality of the state constituted by contract, it seems that Della Rocca actually reinforces the picture of the state as a threat to the freedom of individual people.

By contrast, Steinberg (2009) argues that Spinoza's state can be held to be a direct and active source of liberation for those who live within it, just because it is the context in which their power of acting is increased. This can be said to be the originating purpose of the state, in that the desire for protection and security that provides the motivation for the contract requires that the power of individuals is not merely aggregated but in fact multiplied in the formation of the state. Steinberg thus rejects the individualist formulation that anything that acts upon an individual person threatens her freedom. Indeed, the established state's own persistence in being may be said to rely for its success on increasing the power of those who live within it:

Spinoza's normative political claims are grounded in the view that the state ought to attempt to promote general welfare (meaning the satisfaction of real interests) and cultivate virtue in its citizens as far as the limits of human nature and state power allow. (2009, p44)

One thing that the state can do is to mandate ways of life that are in accordance with reason, such that even people who do not have the capacity to reason for themselves are able to enjoy the benefits of living according to reason:

...the citizen-subject in a well-organised commonwealth will resemble the free man in that he will “live as reason prescribes” (will be as-if rational), meaning that he will do what is in the interest of the welfare of the people as a whole, which is in turn to do what is in his own interest... Laws – at least laws of a good state – are framed to maximise the power (liberty) or welfare of all citizens. (2009, p45)

Like Della Rocca, Steinberg equates Spinoza’s claim that the purpose of the state is freedom with the state’s potential to deliver a way of life that accords with reason, whether or not individual people are capable of appreciating that specific laws or institutions have the effect of aligning their behaviours and practices with what reason requires. Steinberg further develops this insight to argue that there is also an affective dimension to how individuals perceive and follow the laws, such that people may come closer to a life of reason, and indeed be more reliable in their inclination to keep to the law, if they obey from hope rather than from fear. Thus a normative constraint on the state is introduced, on which a good state is one which both has the right kinds of laws and cultivates positive reasons for people to follow them. Steinberg concludes:

[T]he political works can rightly be regarded as Spinoza’s attempt to spell out, at the civic level, the conditions in which individuals can best perfect their natures and come to form a genuine union or harmony. (2009, p25)

Steinberg thus paints a compelling picture of Spinoza’s political writings as deploying the understanding of human freedom developed in the *Ethics*, to derive practical lessons for how individual people can be drawn to live together. It puts flesh on the bones of Della Rocca’s appeal to the thought that the state is the locus of greater rationality, and is a welcome departure from the zero-sum individualism exhibited by more traditional liberal readings. But Steinberg’s interpretation still relies on the thought that Spinoza’s state effectively acts as a proxy for individual rationality; thus it grants the state an inherent normative

authority and fails to defuse the tension between the individual and the state that motivates minimal-state readings. In addition, it leaves unaddressed the question of why a free person – one who is capable of acting from reason on her own account rather than only in obedience to the law – should subject herself to life in a state whose laws are primarily directed at enhancing the freedom of those who do not themselves have the capacity to govern their passions. Or, as Sorrell (2008) puts it, “how can the Spinozan sage need to join forces with people who are...uncomprehending of, and hostile to, such a sage?... It is implausible to claim...that any old rule of law, no matter how much it restricts a public life of the mind, leaves the rational person freer than solitude” (p158). Steinberg cannot answer this challenge simply by reiterating Spinoza’s contention that reason will commend living according to the law as conferring greater freedom than a solitary life (E4p73), as this is precisely the charge against Spinoza: that, on his own account, an individual with the resources to enjoy the freedom of a rational life cannot be understood as having that freedom enhanced by living with people who are governed by affect.

Behind the individualistic line of interpretation is a commitment to the view that Spinoza’s philosophy involves a model of human behaviour grounded in egoistic psychology. The contention is that Spinoza’s concept of *conatus*, or striving to persevere in being, makes it the case that any human being has an inbuilt tendency to follow their own desires, and consequently the state is effectively an instrumental concession on the part of individual human beings seeking to improve their life chances and conditions. It drives more or less inexorably to a picture of the state as *prima facie* in competition with the interests and natural right of its citizens; for on this construction the state is ontologically secondary to its citizens and is brought into being only at a direct cost to them. The impasse between the state and the individual must then be resolved by an appeal to extending reason, or restraining affect, or *de facto* empowerment – the difficulty being that the postulation of egoistic psychology as the human realisation of *conatus* ensures that the Spinozistic basis for the impasse is always stronger than that for the solution.

The variety and divergence among individualist interpretations, as well as the objections sketched above, show that the tension between individual and state power in Spinoza's philosophy is far from easily resolved. One way of addressing this problem is to set aside the methodological commitment of taking the individual as ontologically prior to the state, such that the state's power necessarily infringes on that of the people who live within it. An alternative approach is offered by philosophers who read Spinoza as accepting a tension between individual and state power as an irreducible fact, and who locate the significance of his political writings in how states are constituted as complex collective entities.

Balibar (1998), for example, argues that the state in Spinoza's philosophy should be taken as a present limit on sovereignty, where sovereignty itself is to be understood as an ongoing process of transfer of power, rather than as the outcome of a once-for-all contract:

...sovereignty as it actually exists turns out to be a continuous process of collective production in which individual powers are 'transferred' to the public authority and ideological fluctuations are stabilised... (1998, p31)

Appreciating sovereignty as a process also means appreciating that the tensions between the state and those who live under its laws are persistently present, brought about by institutions that are at best partially capable of reflecting and channelling the desires of the populace. The task of government is not to rid the state of tensions, but to develop sufficient resilience to respond to them:

[O]ur institutions are always ambivalent: in certain conditions they will correct their own internal weaknesses; in others, they will collapse, precipitating peoples and states into chaos and violence. (1998, p38)

This reading of Spinoza departs fundamentally from individualist interpretations, in denying that 'right' coheres in individuals in some pre- or extra-social sense. Indeed, Balibar holds that Spinoza's thesis that right is coextensive with power means that right can only be understood as actualised:

[T]he idea of a 'theoretical' right, which is conceived as a capacity to act and which may either be recognised and exercised or not, is an absurdity or a mystification. (1998, p60)

Right actualised means right evidenced by actions and by forms of life, which necessarily entails that right is exercised in relation to one's environment. The rights and powers of individual human beings are therefore conditioned by their relations with other human beings, and indeed with all aspects of the world in which they live. When Spinoza claims that the purpose of the state is freedom, Balibar argues, the content of this notion of freedom cannot be taken as self-evident. Rather, it needs to be understood in terms of the independence of action made available to the individual human being in the context of her dependence on others. Within this framework, independence and dependence do not present a simple antithesis – they will vary and evolve. Nor are they necessarily in conflict – for “dependence can also constitute a positive condition through which one can, up to a point, preserve and affirm one's own individuality” (p60).

In this reading, the state represents not the mere aggregation of the powers of the individuals within it, but the constitution of a new individual, with its own rights, powers and indeed dependences, one of which is its dependence on the individuals who constitute it and who seek in it the furtherance of their own independence. The state therefore has a double nature, of identity on the one hand and reciprocity on the other. Its continued existence relies on its ability to preserve both its own power *qua* individual and that of those who live within its laws, so that they will continue to play their part in preserving its being. In this sense, the requirement of democracy is immanent in the state, whatever form of government pertains; and the strongest state is that which is capable of diagnosing the basis of its own internal reciprocities and regulating its powers accordingly. When Spinoza cites Seneca to assure us that tyrannies do not endure (*TTP*5[22]; *TTP*16[29]), Balibar parses this claim not as an expression of pragmatic optimism, but as postulating that an oppressive state is already in a condition of degeneration, in which the reciprocity between government and people has broken down:

When the state has grown so “mad” that it threatens to deprive its citizens of the minimum viable measure of individuality...it always in the end provokes the outrage of the multitude... (1998, p70)

Balibar, then, understands Spinoza’s stipulation that the purpose of the state is freedom as proposing that human freedom is realised, and indeed realisable, only within the fact of sociability and collective forms of life. Similarly, Del Lucchese (2009) agrees that the concept of the abstract or solitary free individual is simply incoherent, and argues that the tension between individual and state power is a necessary feature of the state as an individual composed of multiple individuals whose needs and desires are only partially aligned:

Its weaknesses and vices are not due to its multiplicity *qua* multiplicity, but to the single individuals who expect to make themselves universal; in other words, to the predomination of the disjunctive elements...over the connective elements. (2009, p130)

The multiple constitution of the state is not a flaw to be overcome in a political quest for absolute unity, but “the irreducible core of a society’s virtue and power” (p115). Multiplicity implies complexity and a greater potential for affirming *conatus* through relations, exchanges and encounters. Del Lucchese specifically argues that, for Spinoza, “Conflict cannot be reduced to a simple pathology of the political life. It is, rather, one of its manifestations” (p62). Viewing conflict as problematic, something to be eliminated from political life, is a mistake. The state comes into being as a means of people preserving themselves by avoiding or preventing conflicts which are pathological, but this means neither an end to all conflict, nor that conflict itself is intrinsically problematic. Indeed, Del Lucchese argues that apparently conflictual expressions of *indignatio* may be understood as expressions of the desire to preserve the state:

This affect of the multitude is expressed in critical situations, revealing the positive side of every crisis, namely, the drive and capacity for resistance that opposes whatever causes the body social to disaggregate. (2009, p60)

Tension and conflict, then, are essential elements in the construction and preservation of the freedom which is attained within the state. They are not contrary to political rationality – living according to the dictates of reason – but complement it. The very rationality exhibited by the state involves multiplicity and the struggles that come with it:

[J]ust as rationality does not impose itself in the single individual to the detriment of the passions, but rather contributes to organising the dynamics, differences and conflicts by intertwining with the affects, in the same way, the conflicts and differences that are produced in the multiple amplify the power – the capacity to affect and be affected in different ways – of the collective body. (2009, p136)

As for Balibar, the defining feature of the best state – the most absolute, or democratic, state – under Del Lucchese's reading is that it preserves itself, not in opposition to its people in any sense, but rather through a responsiveness to internal changes by regulating its own powers. This means being able to counter and redirect the damaging aspects of conflict while still enabling the expression of power by people who live within the state:

Absolute right, power, and rationality are only other names for the multiplicity, variety and heterogeneity of the multitude... Natural power and rights must be sought...in the very activity of self-organisation of the differences, including conflict. Only if the multiple is able to affirm itself *qua* multiple with non-destructive effects will it give rise to a fully absolute state, namely, a democracy. (2009, p149)

In orienting our consideration of Spinoza's political philosophy towards the collective, these philosophers give us valuable insights into the philosophical grounding for Spinoza's view that the purpose of the state is freedom. As a multiple individual, the state has the capacity to open up ways of life that enable people living under its laws to realise their own power in new and distinctive ways. And the preservation of the state requires that, while these ways of life are shared, they are not uniform – the state is, as it were, nourished by the existence of multiplicity and diversity within itself, whereas complete unity or homogeneity would mean stasis and disintegration.

However, in accepting and even embracing the tensions within the state, including those between the state and its people, it can appear that these readings simply neglect the question of how people experience the state, and whether or in what way that experience can validly be described as freedom. If some individualist readings may be criticised for conceptualising the state *per se* as an encroachment on the freedom of individuals, then collectivist readings perhaps over-emphasise the state's enabling power relative to the power that it exercises over individuals. And whether or not individualist accounts are unwarranted in taking the individual and her freedom as standing in need of no further conceptual elaboration, collectivist accounts give insufficient attention to what it means to be an individual, either within the state or as one of a multitude. Most of all, none of the interpretations which treat ontology as the key to Spinoza's political philosophy make it a priority to explore the relation between the state and freedom, and how people partake in and contribute to this relation. This raises the question of whether there are alternative approaches available which could build on the positive aspects of the collectivist ontological readings – accepting the existence of the state *qua* individual – while also looking at what Spinoza thinks happens within the state, and thus prove more illuminating as to how Spinoza believes that the state has freedom as its purpose and effect.

3. An Epistemological Turn

Melamed (2013a) argues specifically against attempts to 'domesticate' Spinoza to the values of the philosophical mainstream, or to cast him as a prototype for Enlightenment liberalism:

...the main motivation behind this practice is to show that Spinoza's political thought is *relevant* to today's discourse, or that Spinoza was the source of what we deem to be fair and right. We interpret Spinoza charitably (i.e., bending the text so that it can be read as expressing a desirable and respectable political view)... (2013a, p272)

He contends (2013b) that Spinoza explicitly rejects Hobbes' theory of social contract, arguing that human beings never transcend the state of nature and that the absolute government envisaged by Hobbes is impossible on any account of natural right. Consequently, "mortal sovereigns, having limited powers, are

equally limited in their rights” (p179) and good rulers are those who succeed in exercising the power they do have in a way that delivers stability and consent. In other words, political philosophy needs to concern itself with the understanding of what is and is not possible, given the laws of logic, nature and human nature. Melamed locates the core of Spinoza’s political thought in his treatment of the Hebrew state in Chapters 17 and 18 of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, which he describes as “a case study of the psychological foundations of politics and religion” (p177).

Rosenthal (1997) argues against the thought that Spinoza explains political life as a straightforward outcome of reason: “although reason teaches important principles about politics, it cannot itself solve the pre-eminent political problem: how to convince men led by their passions that their interests are best served in society” (p240). Melamed (2013b) follows Rosenthal in reading Spinoza’s exposition of the Hebrew state³ as a political exemplar, one that can give insight into principles of good governance: “an exceptional political arrangement that is exceedingly successful at achieving the loyalty and devotion of its citizens, restraining the sovereign’s power, and securing internal peace and equality” (p184). He shows that Spinoza makes use of this account to draw out some important political lessons, both positive and negative, on questions that would resonate with his Dutch contemporaries: questions of equality of standing in the *respublica divina*; questions of theocratic, democratic and monarchical government; questions of the relative position of religious and political leadership, and of relations with other nations. However, the lessons of Chapters 17 and 18 of the *Theologico-Political Treatise* are not merely pragmatic. The prudential, imaginative aspects of this case study, argues Melamed, are explored within the framework of a “political philosophy grounded in an economy of human emotions” (p180): the purpose of those who govern is “...to establish everything so that everyone prefers the public right to the private advantage” (TTP17[257]). The business of government is securing peace, not through the

³ Melamed also points out that Spinoza’s Hebrew state differs from both the Biblical and the historical Hebrew state in various respects, by both description and omission, thus underlining its status in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* as a pedagogic device rather than a political ideal.

promotion of reason but through the control of affect, in accordance with Spinoza's own injunction:

...an affect can be restrained only by an affect stronger than, and contrary to itself, and...men avoid inflicting injury through fear of incurring a greater injury themselves. On this law society can be established, so long as it keeps in its own hand the right, possessed by everyone, of avenging injury, and pronouncing on good and evil... (E4p37s2)

Melamed cites Spinoza's recognition in Chapter 17 of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* that such control of affect is not limited in principle:

[W]ithout any intellectual incoherence we can conceive men who believe, love, hate, disdain or are overcome by any kind of affect whatever, solely in accordance with the right of the state. (TTP17[10])

He argues that this articulation of the possibility of complete alignment between individuals' affects and the right of the state presses us to see Spinoza's state as achieving stable rule through effective manipulation of its population, "a sophisticated, non-violent means of controlling the masses" (p180). Here, the 'economy of human emotions' to which Melamed refers is not a free market but an asymmetric set of relations in which the state exercises a dominant influence. It is clear that Spinoza was cognisant of the potential for manipulation of emotion, by the state itself or by parties within the state. However, *contra* Melamed, this does not warrant the inference that Spinoza must view people experiencing affect in accordance with the right of the state as being coerced or manipulated. One way in which one's affective life may be determined by the state is simply by happening to live within a set of values that do not obviously conflict with one's own desires. Another is the possibility raised by Della Rocca, that in deploying one's reason one comes to see things from the perspective of the state rather than from one's own individual perspective. Nonetheless, Melamed's shift of focus, from the theoretical foundations and constitution of the state to the question of how life is lived within the state, is a useful reminder that Spinoza does not limit philosophy to ontological principles and commitments: he

has more to say about just how politics and sociability play out among human beings.

This point is recognised by philosophers who approach Spinoza's political writings through his accounts of the human mind and the affects, rather than his ontology. Gatens and Lloyd (1999) argue that Spinoza has a richer account of how politics and sociability arise than is apparent from either his ontology or his exposition of contract theory in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*:

To understand the operation of the passions in individual life is at the same time to understand the relations of collaboration and antagonism which bind human beings together in society. (1999, p28)

On this interpretation, Spinoza's lengthy exposition of human affect in Parts 3 and 4 of the *Ethics* provides the basis for understanding both the origins and the internal dynamics of the state. In particular, they point to a theory in which sociability is a fundamental aspect of human life, not because the state as a collective individual constituted by reason takes ontological priority, but because it is inextricably linked with the fact of human striving. Political organisations of different kinds are emergent configurations of lived sociability:

...organised forms of collective life based in agreements emerge gradually and bear the marks of the earlier theological and historical forms from which they emerged. Outside of the abstractions of philosophy there is no community, society or polity whose origins lie solely in contract. (1999, p91)

On this argument, questions of state legitimacy and freedom in the state refocus onto what kinds of collective ways of life are generated, and how freedom is understood by the people party to those ways of life. Social fictions in the form of shared imaginations underpin social norms and institutions; and these fictions are intrinsically binding inasmuch as they coincide with and shape people's striving. Equally, they are necessarily open to challenge:

The imagination, appropriately schooled, comes to play a significant role in the critique of socially embedded illusions... (1999, p33)

Human striving, in particular the mind's striving to know better, results in new thinking which may undermine established practices and open up new possibilities. Thus Spinoza's political philosophy gives us a picture of evolving and emergent social relations, rather than either a struggle for precedence between individuals of different kinds or a reconciliation of individuality with multiplicity.

Gatens (2009) elaborates the point about social constitution to argue that Spinoza's understanding of imagination and affect entails that not only experiences but individuals themselves are fundamentally shaped by the societies and norms within which they are situated:

[Spinoza] places the onus of responsibility on the civil body for acts of commission also, that is, the actual behaviour and values of the citizens, since their morality is largely constituted through, and dependent on, the particular laws of the state. (2009, p197)

Consequently, the question of human freedom is inextricable from that of how past and present social imaginaries give rise to, or indeed block the development of, specific understandings of social relations and individual capabilities. This means that "modes of knowing imply specific ways of being" (p206): there is a strong link in Spinoza's philosophy between political life and the life of the mind.

James (2011, 2012a) takes up this point to consider how the epistemological dimension of sociability can contribute both to social development and to philosophy. She argues that Spinoza's political philosophy mandates certain epistemological virtues: the avoidance of hypocrisy and stubbornness in denying evidence or insights, and the cultivation of openness and sincerity in consideration of new or challenging ideas. The enactment of these virtues enables people living within the state to engage in positive critique of its institutions and norms, and give the good state resilience and adaptability. James also shows that the cultivation of cooperative epistemological practices as a feature of life in the state helps to explain why Spinoza's 'free man', who is capable of living according to reason on his own understanding, should prefer to live in the state:

As long as philosophers continue to live cooperatively, they are not only individually free to think in the privacy of their own studies, but also collectively free to cooperate publicly with one another in developing their adequate understanding. (2012a, p188)

Spinoza acknowledges that state power can take a variety of forms: institutions and laws but also political narratives and behavioural norms or assumptions. The best state brings about a reflexive reinforcement of its own power and stability by enabling people to develop their discursive and epistemological capabilities in ways which enhance their freedom:

The arts of constructive communication and negotiation on which the strength of a free state rests cannot be created by decree...[T]he freedom to philosophise plays a crucial role. (2012a, p317)

By granting the freedom to philosophise, so Spinoza implies, a state extends its ability to develop and become habituated to a respectful, truth-seeking discourse that in turn strengthens the bonds of cooperation on which its securing and liberty depend. (2012a, p318)

The work of Gatens and James indicates a means of escaping the impasse between individualist and collectivist ontological readings of Spinoza's political philosophy. If we understand human sociability and therefore political life as an expression of the philosophy of mind and affect elaborated in the three central parts of the *Ethics*, we can hope to achieve a reading which addresses some of the tensions and apparent anomalies of the political works, from the reconciliation of the powers of different individuals to how the state enables freedom. We can also expect that such a reading will give us at least some insight into how commonality and difference play out in contexts of sociability, the place and function of institutions, and how people experience and respond to living within the state. Rather than Spinoza appearing to vacillate between optimism and resignation in his political writings – about state self-regulation, human nature or indeed the transformative potential of philosophy – we can read him as a philosopher for whom human sociability is not merely one focus of investigation among many but of central importance to philosophy. This understanding is the focus of my exploration in this thesis of the workings of

Spinoza's philosophy, from the expressive metaphysics of Part 1 of the *Ethics* to the articulation of the purpose of the state as freedom in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*.

Chapter 2

Essence, Expression, Effect

In Chapter 1 I suggested that the sharp divergence between individualist and collectivist strands in ontologically-oriented interpretations of Spinoza's political philosophy can be explained by differing perceptions of what constitutes a genuine individual in his metaphysical system, and whether some kinds of individuals take ontological precedence over others. In this chapter I explore the first part of that question¹. I propose that individual modes in Spinoza's philosophy are individuated and distinguished by their effects in existence, rather than by their essences. In elaborating this proposal, I acknowledge a debt to Deleuze's 'expressionist' reading of the *Ethics*, while challenging Deleuze's exclusion of inadequate ideas from the domain of expression. I contend that inadequate ideas are genuinely expressive of the modes which form them and that appreciating this gives a more powerful expressionist reading of Spinoza. I base my argument on the early propositions of Part 2 of the *Ethics*, in particular the implications of the 'physical interlude' at E2P13 for Spinoza's common notions. I argue that the location of the common notions in shared properties of bodies demonstrates that differentiation among modes is always partial, but nonetheless actual; and that individuation and variety among modes is best understood through an appreciation of modes as expressions of substance, distinguished by the effects they bring about in their existence. Viewing modes from the perspective of effect avoids diverting the concerns of Spinoza's ontology either to a search for 'fundamental' modes or to modes of the greatest complexity. Rather, whatever produces an effect such that it is able to affect other modes may be considered an individual. Then the focus of our philosophical interest is redirected to the scope and nature of the actual effects which are brought about by some individual.

¹ The second part is addressed in Chapter 6.

1. Deleuze: Spinoza as Expressionist

Deleuze's reading of Spinoza as articulating a philosophy of expression (1990) is grounded in the claim that Part 1 of the *Ethics* articulates a philosophy of expression. Substance contains in its essence whatever expresses reality; the attributes of substance express the reality or being of substance; individual things are modes expressing these attributes in a particular manner. In following through these different ontological levels to elaborate an expressionist reading of the *Ethics*, Deleuze insists that Spinoza should be understood as using *exprimere* both consistently and technically, and that the activity of expression is central to appreciating his systemic philosophy². The expression by modes in the domain of temporal existence inferred as a corollary of E1p25 must be taken as derivative of substance's expression in attributes and attributes' expression in modifications, that is, in modes themselves.

...the very first level of expression must be understood as the very constitution, a genealogy almost, of the essence of substance. The second must be understood as the very production of particular things... God expresses himself...by in himself constituting *natura naturans*, before expressing himself through producing within himself *natura naturata*. (1990, p14)

In the metaphysical picture, therefore, modes can be seen as both expressions of substance and as individuals which express their own essences, as a means of expressing or manifesting God's power. Deleuze acknowledges that Spinoza's appeal to expression is to some extent a conventional one, or at least in continuity with certain traditions of thought, notably Jewish and Christian Neoplatonisms. However, this does not deprive the concept of philosophical importance. Whereas some earlier twentieth century interpretations had contended that Spinoza's expressionism was philosophically incomprehensible, Deleuze argues that it is both cogent and essential to understanding his philosophy.

² Deleuze reads both Spinoza and Leibniz as articulating a philosophy of expression (Deleuze, 1988). This approach to Spinoza's use of *exprimere* stands in contrast to other readings of Spinoza. For example Curley (1986) does not include *exprimere* as a systematic term in his glossary, treating it as a purely informal or narrative term.

One common objection to the expressionist thesis is that it fails to distinguish between what is expressed and what it expresses. Deleuze concurs to some extent, but sees this as a strength of Spinoza's philosophy, notably in that it makes possible an epistemology that eschews representational or operational accounts of knowledge acquisition in favour of an understanding of knowledge as a relation of recognition and involvement. Similarly, Deleuze rejects an objection from Kaufmann (1940) that Spinoza's use of expression amounts to either substantive mysticism or the merely aesthetic. Rather, he sees Spinoza's appeal to expression as a way of articulating the coexistence of change and continuity, at both the metaphysical and existential levels. However, he makes one significant exception:

The One remains involved in what expresses it, imprinted in what unfolds it, immanent in whatever manifests it: expression is in this respect an involvement. There is no conflict between the two terms, except in one specific case...the context of finite modes and their passions. (1990, p16)

However, in making this exception Deleuze threatens to compromise his own argument for expressionism at the existential level. For the passions of finite modes are so ubiquitous and ineliminable that, if they bear no relation to expression, it seems doubtful that an expressionist reading of Spinoza could have anything philosophically interesting to say about existent modes. In effect, the implication that finite modes express the power of God only insofar as they avoid undergoing passions would seem to put those same finite modes largely beyond the explanatory scope of Spinoza's philosophy. If this were the case, we would be hard put to explain the lengths to which Spinoza goes in the *Ethics* to give a systematic account of affects and their significance in human life.

Deleuze bases his exception on the thought that, for Spinoza, "an inadequate idea is an inexpressive idea" (p145); that is, that modes express God's power only through their adequate ideas. Only adequate ideas express a mode's essence and are therefore such as to bring about effects that can be clearly and distinctly understood only through that mode's nature alone (*E2d2*). The ideas in modes which arise through passions are inadequate ideas which do

not express anything about the passion itself, or about the external source or cause of the passion:

We do not therefore possess our ideas in conditions such that they can express their own (material) cause. Our ideas of affections do of course 'involve' their own cause, that is, the objective essence of the external body; but they do not 'express' or 'explain' it. They similarly involve our power of thinking, but are not explained by it, and are referred to chance. (1990, p146)

Deleuze infers from this that such ideas cannot be expressive of anything:

...the primary "thing indicated" [by an inadequate idea] is never our essence, but always a momentary state of our changing constitution; the secondary (or indirect) thing indicated is never the nature or essence of some external thing, but is rather an appearance that only allows us to recognize a thing by its effect, to rightly or wrongly assert its mere presence. (1990, p147)

There is no doubt that Deleuze is correct to say that Spinoza takes most of our ideas of things to be inadequate, or 'mutilated and confused' (*E2p40s2*); it is also the case that such inadequate ideas are far removed from the objective essence of their causes (*E2p45*)³. It is, however, far from obvious that this entails that our ideas of affections should be 'referred to chance', given that much of the *Ethics* is devoted to demonstrating that our ideas of affections can be understood and explained systematically. Further, the basis for Deleuze's distinction between ideas 'involving' our power of thinking, on the one hand, and ideas that are 'explained by' our power of thinking on the other, seems questionable. For on Spinoza's principle that all ideas, whether adequate or inadequate, follow from each other with the same necessity (*E2p36*), any idea – whether adequate or inadequate – that involves our power of thinking must be at least in part explained by our power of thinking. In other words, our (adequate) power of thinking is both involved in and is a (partial) explanation of the inadequate ideas that make up the greatest part of our minds or our thinking. Further, all the other aspects of our inadequate ideas must also in principle be amenable to

³ These elements of Spinoza's epistemology/philosophy of mind will be addressed more fully in Chapter 4.

explanation, albeit not immediately with reference to the essence of any one thing.

In this chapter, I endorse Deleuze's insight that expression can be understood as the basis for individuation and distinction between modes. However, I shall argue, *contra* Deleuze, that inadequate ideas are indeed expressive ideas: an inadequate idea must be understood as expression on the part of the existent mode which forms it. In other words, and contrary to Deleuze's contention that "the ideas we have are signs, indicative images impressed in us, rather than expressive ideas formed by us" (p147), an inadequate idea is indeed a product or effect of some mode's expression. I shall argue further that an individual mode's inadequate ideas are at least as expressive of its individuality as its adequate ideas; and that the more complex the individual mode, the more its individuality is expressed by inadequate ideas. To ground this interpretation, I shall argue that it is possible to make use of the idea of expression initially articulated by Deleuze without appealing to the essence of individual modes.

2. Essence and Existence

The advantage claimed by Deleuze for appealing to expression as the basis for interpreting Spinoza is that it demonstrates that his philosophy is not merely an elegantly-constructed metaphysical system but has explanatory power as regards modes and their existence, particularly in opening the way for an epistemology of recognition rather than representation. One difficulty with elaborating expression as the expression of essence in the form of the adequate idea of an individual, however, is the way that Spinoza sets essence apart from existence. *E1a1* states that "If a thing can be conceived as non-existing, its essence does not involve existence", and *E1p24* concludes that "The essence of things produced by God does not involve existence". Individual modes (as Deleuze recognises) are existing things produced by God as *natura naturata*; they are things which "without God can neither exist nor be conceived" (*E1p29s*) and as such are things which can be conceived as non-existing. Spinoza detaches essence from existence for everything other than substance; God's being the

efficient cause of both the essence and the existence of things (*E1p25*) entails that any existent mode expresses *God's* essence, and not some individual essence particular to it.

This being so, we can see an obvious difficulty for Deleuze's argument that modes express God's power only through adequate ideas that constitute their essences. First, as shown above, modes express God's essence, and do so directly, rather than expressing some essence of their own. One might think that this need not be a fatal objection: essence might be attributed to a mode insofar as it is a unique individual thing, expressing the power of God in a unique way. However, the adequate idea of any individual mode, whilst certainly adequate and unique to it, could not then constitute its essence; for inasmuch as a mode could be said to have, or express, a particular essence, that essence would have to be expressed in all attributes, whereas an idea is a modification of substance specifically and solely under the attribute of thought. Whilst it is correct to say that Spinoza's system requires that there must be an adequate, or complete, idea of any individual existent mode in the mind of God, to claim that idea as the essence of the mode in question would be to claim textually-unwarranted privilege for the attribute of thought⁴. So, whatever an adequate idea of a mode may be, it cannot be identical with the essence of the mode in question.

But the greatest difficulty which arises for Deleuze's project is that siting essence and expression in the adequate idea of a mode threatens the epistemological dimension of his reading of Spinoza. Deleuze sees in Spinoza's philosophy an epistemology of recognition, grounded in expression as an involvement in the world of things to be known:

...he was seeking a conception of knowledge that would account for it, not as some operation on an object that remained outside it, but as a reflection, an expression, of an object in the mind. (1990, p15)

Such an epistemology, then, would understand knowing as the recognition of the various expressions of existent modes or things in the world, a recognition made

⁴ The most that could be said would be that such an idea was the essence of that mode under the attribute of thought.

possible in virtue of the knower's also being an existent mode expressed and expressing herself in the world. And this seems a potentially promising approach to addressing the problems associated with knowledge of other existent things. Conceiving of knowledge as consisting in the recognition by a mode of the expressions of other modes both ensures that modes as knowers are situated within the world of things to be known, and defines a criterion for what counts as knowledge, that is, knowledge of the expressions of other modes. However, Deleuze's strategy of confining expression to adequate ideas on the one hand and defining expression as the criterion for recognition or knowability on the other effectively restricts the scope of knowledge to adequate ideas and thus effectively nullifies his appeal to the epistemological productivity of understanding knowers as situated within the world of things to be known. For the relevant objects of knowledge then become the adequate ideas of modes, as they are in the mind of God. And this could mean one of two things: either a mode is to be known as a simple, unified idea of its essence, setting aside the various encounters experienced in its existence; or a mode is to be known as a complex which encompasses and expresses the adequate ideas of all of its encounters. Deleuze can admit only the first possibility, since on his account a mode's ideas of its encounters are necessarily inadequate and thus not expressive. The second possibility, meanwhile, creates barriers to the very recognition which Deleuze sees as the core of Spinoza's epistemology, in that recognition of a mode must comprehend every aspect of its existence. Either way, conflation of a mode's expression with its adequate idea has the effect of cancelling out the epistemological advantage of an expressionist reading of Spinoza.

In what follows, I argue that it is possible to secure and develop the insights of Deleuze's proposed epistemology of recognition by following Spinoza in separating essence from existence. However, this also means rejecting the stipulation that only adequate ideas are expressive. I will argue for a modified reading under which all ideas may be taken as expressive and therefore recognisable by knowers. This means acknowledging expression in *inadequate* ideas – the ideas which modes form for themselves. In Deleuze's terms, ideas of

both a mode's bodily states and the appearances by which its effects may be recognised are no longer excluded from expression. The textual basis for this departure from Deleuze, and its implications for how we understand Spinoza's world of modes, is elaborated below.

3. Modes, Composition and Differentiation

In discussing Spinoza's modes I shall focus on individual existent things, expressing substance and manifest in the infinite attributes of substance (E1p25c; E1p36d; E2p7)⁵. The modes constituting the world of existing things are infinitely differentiated (E2pp3-4): under the category of mode we should include any and all macro-level (i.e. perceptible) individuals, including natural and made objects; all living things; social institutions and possibly even cultural and social practices⁶. We should also include all micro-level individuals and potential individuals – that is, whilst it may be the case that individual existents are not exhaustive of the totality of modes, anything that could be conceived as having individuality should be capable on that basis of being understood as a mode. A productive reading of Spinoza's ontology, then, will be one which explains the individuation of existent modes in terms of what they share, and what distinguishes them from one another. Part 2 of the *Ethics* gives the basis for such an explanation through the case study, as it were, of the human mind. The human mind is “the idea of a singular thing which actually exists” (E2p11) and which has as its object “a certain mode of extension which actually exists” (E2p13), such that “man consists of a mind and a body, and the human body exists, as we are aware of it” (Ep13c). But this is no more than can be said of any existent thing:

[T]he things we have shown so far are completely general and do not pertain to man more than to other individuals, all of which, though in differing degrees, are nevertheless animate. For of each thing there is

⁵ The exact ontological status of modes is much debated in the scholarship of Spinoza's metaphysics (e.g. Curley, 1969; Bennett, 1984; Carriero, 1995; Melamed, 2009). However, what seems beyond doubt is that any individual existent thing must be understood as a mode in some sense. In this chapter I talk of modes as being such phenomenal individuals, primarily for ease of exposition; my argument for the expressiveness of inadequate ideas does not rely on this understanding of a mode.

⁶ I expand on this point in Chapter 6.

necessarily an idea in God, of which God is the cause in the same way he is of the human body. And so, whatever we have said of the idea of the human body must also be said of the idea of any thing. (*E2p13s*)

In the sense of existing as an idea and an object each expressing substance under the relevant attributes, then, a human being is not differentiated from any other individual. Spinoza goes on, in a clear signal of his departure from Cartesianism, to associate the observable differentiation among individuals with the nature of their bodies:

...to determine what is the difference between the human mind and the others, and how it surpasses them, it is necessary for us, as we have said, to know the nature of its object, that is, of the human body... [I]n proportion as a body is more capable than others of doing many things at once, or being acted on in many ways at once, so its mind is more capable than others of perceiving many things at once. And in proportion as the actions of a body depend more on itself alone, and as other bodies concur with it less in acting, so its mind is more capable of understanding distinctly. (*E2p13s*)

Spinoza thus identifies the distinctiveness of individuals as being intrinsically bound up with their bodies, or how they express substance through the attribute of body; and he seeks to elaborate this through an explanation of the nature of bodies in general. He gives an account of bodies as to be understood and explained through certain common features and, in doing so, sets the groundwork for his explanation of the human mind as known through and reflective of the human body, which in turn is situated among other bodies and subject to the same laws as they are. In other words, human beings are one kind of (highly composite and complex) individual among infinitely many others; whatever it means to say that human beings, whether considered as minds or bodies, express substance, it does not mean that they do this in virtue of some special fact about human beings that separates them from nature in general⁷. Rather, human beings are composite individuals which, like other complex individuals, are able to retain their identity through recomposition and through

⁷ The physical interlude at *E2p13s* thus serves to underline the point of *E2p10* “The being of substance does not pertain to the essence of man, or substance does not constitute the form of man.”

changes in magnitude and direction, provided that they and their parts retain their nature – that is, their ratio of motion and rest (E2p13sL6). Thus the human body can be understood as occupying some (not specified) place in a spectrum of individual complexity, within which “we shall easily conceive that the whole of nature is one individual, whose parts, that is, all bodies, vary in infinite ways, without any change of the whole individual” (E2p13sL7s).

From this set of principles, Spinoza derives postulates intended to capture some intuitions about human bodies in the terms in which he has argued for the commonalities among bodies in general. Key among these intuitions are that the human body is a composite of numerous individual parts⁸; that these parts have diverse natures; that the human body can be affected in a range of different ways; that it requires other bodies for its preservation through recombination; and that, as well as being affected by other bodies, it can affect other bodies in different ways. These postulates serve as the basis for an account of how the human mind comes to form ideas from its encounters with other individuals; I shall revisit this account in Chapter 4. Here I consider whether Spinoza’s sketch of a spectrum of bodily complexity, with associated complexity of animation (E2p13s), can provide sufficient resources for an account of differentiation among individuals expressing substance.

The question of individuation and animation in Spinoza’s philosophy has echoes in recent commentary on whether Spinoza can provide a coherent account of consciousness. Such inquiries seek to identify mental activity, or observable consciousness, as a correlate of Spinoza’s understanding of what bodies have in common and what underlies their differences. Garrett (2008) interprets Spinoza’s doctrine that everything is to some degree animate as suggesting a philosophy of incremental naturalism: that the scale of consciousness is comprehensive, mapping animation and therefore beginning at the most rudimentary level of nature, with human beings relatively high up, amoebas relatively low down, and so on. By contrast, Nadler (2008) holds that animation and consciousness need not be identified in this way, since animation

⁸ That is, of *plurimis (diversae naturae) individuus* (E2p13L7s, post1). Translations vary: Curley has “individuals of different natures”; Shirley, “individual parts of different natures”.

is universal whereas consciousness may be understood as a feature of only certain individuals. He trades on Spinoza's claim that individuals capable of being affected in many different ways are capable of a great many things (*E2p14*), to argue that consciousness is a capacity of individuals whose physical composition and, by extension, capacity for being affected is above a certain threshold of complexity; beyond that threshold, increasingly complex individuals have increasingly greater capacities for consciousness. Drawing on both of these interpretations to some extent, Marshall (2013) has argued that Spinoza identifies consciousness with affectivity: that consciousness is one observable manifestation of an individual's capacity for experiencing fluctuations in its power in response to encounters with other individuals, and that the greater this capacity, the greater the degree of consciousness in the individual concerned, or the greater that individual's potential for consciousness.

It is clear how these treatments of consciousness relate to the question of differentiation: in asking whether Spinoza can account for consciousness, they put pressure on his philosophy to make qualitative distinctions between existing modes. In different ways, however, they fall short of showing how it can do so. Garrett's incremental naturalism is intuitively plausible in that it is a good fit with Spinoza's pananimation⁹; however, the argument that consciousness is present across all individuals to different degrees is really no more than a restatement of the problem it is supposed to resolve. And since the differences in degree remain unspecified as to significance, it falls short of answering the question of whether Spinoza's philosophy can give an account of observable differences among individuals, such as the difference between apparently sentient and apparently non-sentient beings. Nadler's argument that consciousness is associated with a relevant degree of complexity has a strong grounding in Spinoza's claims about capacity for being affected: this does indeed suggest that complexity has a role to play in identifying individuals and similarities or differences among them. But Nadler's argument essentially begs the question: it posits a threshold of complexity at which consciousness becomes a feature of the individual, but it does not find any resources in Spinoza to

⁹ I use 'pananimation' here rather than 'panpsychism', as the latter seems to reify individual minds in a way that is not necessarily helpful to an appreciation of Spinoza's philosophy of mind.

indicate either how such a threshold could be determined or why complexity at and above a particular level should bring consciousness with it.

Marshall's argument for affectivity as a proxy for consciousness essentially hinges on the thought that, for example, a frying pan is capable of becoming hot, offering resistance to the food placed in it and so on, but not capable of feeling fear (or delight) at the prospect of being heated; a pancreas is capable of secreting hormones in response to relevant fluctuations in blood sugar or protein levels, but it is not capable of rejoicing in its ability to do so. The problem with this argument is that it effectively requires the assumption that if human beings cannot perceive or conceive of the subjectivity of some thing, then that thing has no subjectivity. And although it is presumably true that frying pans and pancreases do not experience the same *kinds* of affective response that human beings do, Spinoza's philosophy will not permit the inference that they therefore do not have affective responses of their own – bizarre though it may seem. For example, an important determining factor in Spinoza's encyclopaedic account of human affect in Part 3 of the *Ethics* is the principle of *conatus* (E3p6), but this principle is clearly intended (as Marshall accepts) to apply to any individual at all. And if any individual can strive to persevere in being then, in the absence of specific textual exclusion by Spinoza, there is no obvious barrier to its doing so, both consciously and affectively. As with Garrett's incremental naturalism, the attempt to move from observable consciousness to a better appreciation of differentiation in Spinoza's philosophy is frustrated by the necessarily universal application of the principle of pananimation.

Spinoza does not concern himself directly with the question of consciousness as differentiating among modes¹⁰. Nonetheless, and despite his concern to emphasise the continuity between human beings and other individuals, so binding them firmly into the natural world, it is hardly conceivable that he was indifferent as to whether his philosophy would also be capable of distinguishing between individuals in nature, and indeed of tracking

¹⁰ Balibar (2013) attributes the initiation of this kind of concept of consciousness to Locke, whose philosophical deployment of the term *conscientia* he contrasts with Spinoza's. Marrama (2017) concludes that Spinoza's references to consciousness cannot and need not differentiate among finite beings.

other distinctions in nature. I suggest that the apparently ingrained circularity of these interpretive strategies derives from their focusing primarily on the composition of bodies in Spinoza's philosophy. I therefore propose an alternative approach: keeping an emphasis on body, which the physical interlude shows is critical for differentiation among individuals, but shifting the focus of inquiry away from bodily composition, and onto the effects that individual bodies have on other individual bodies in the world.

There is textual support for such a shift, especially in the context of interpreting Spinoza's philosophy in expressionist terms. Modes, for example, are both determinate expressions of substance (*E1p25c*) and effects of God as cause (*E1p28*); and Spinoza concludes Part 1 of the *Ethics* by reference to the necessity of modes themselves producing effects:

Whatever exists expresses the nature, *or* essence of God in a certain and determinate way (by *P25C*), that is, (by *P34*), whatever exists expresses in a certain and determinate way the power of God, which is the cause of all things, So (by *P16*), from everything which exists some effect must follow, q.e.d.. (*E1p36d*)

In Part 3 of the *Ethics*, laying the groundwork for his account of the affects, Spinoza again appeals to the concept of effect in defining the conditions for human action; while in Part 4 he appeals to the thought that virtue is an effect of, that is, what is brought about by, an individual or by something's nature:

...if God, insofar as he is affected by an idea which is adequate in someone's mind, is the cause of an effect, that same mind is the effect's adequate cause... (*E3p1d*)

and:

By virtue and power I understand the same thing, that is (by *IIIP7*) virtue, insofar as it is related to man, is the very essence, or nature, of man, insofar as he has the power of bringing about [*efficiendi*] certain things, which can be understood through the laws of his nature alone. (*E4d8*)

Similarly, various of the affects are themselves described as effects or *propria* following from the essence of other affects, or fluctuations in an individual's power:

Overestimation, therefore, is an effect or property [*effectus sive proprietas*] of love, and scorn an effect of hate... (E3DefAff22Exp)

...*pride* is an effect or property of self-love... (E3DefAff28Exp)

Further, striving or *conatus* is often described in terms of seeking to bring something about (*efficiendi*), that is, to have effects:

When we love a thing like ourselves, we strive, as far as we can, to bring it about that it loves us in return. (E3p33)

...according to the guidance of reason, we necessarily strive to bring it about that men live according to the guidance of reason. (E4p17d)

Whilst Spinoza cautions that an effect should not be conflated with the nature of that which produces the effect (E3p29), it is clear that effects follow from the things that cause them; there may then be a diagnostic issue about the multiple causes of certain complex effects but there must of necessity be determinate causes of each effect (E1p11d) and, *ex hypothesi*, the causes of each effect must be identifiable. So there is no difficulty in principle with the thought that modes may be differentiated and identified by their effects. Rather, the question is one of which effects, whether complex or simple, may properly be attributed to a particular mode. The thought underlying Deleuze's exclusion of inadequate ideas from the category of expression is that expression is realised only in those effects of which a mode is an adequate cause and which can be understood through that mode alone. This is the assumption I wish to challenge in the following section. I shall argue that it is proper to understand a mode as expressive even in effects which are brought about by a multiplicity of modes. I shall go on to argue that complex modes should be understood as bringing about effects through their inadequate as well as adequate ideas. Indeed, inadequate ideas are essential to the production of the very effects which individuate and differentiate modes; consequently, inadequate ideas may be recognised as expressive.

4. Effects and Partial Causes

Consider some effect, E, which is brought about by many modes taken together, but which could not be brought about by any one of them singly. Then it seems uncontentious that the cause of E is the conjunction of the modes involved in bringing it about; and that without all of the modes involved, that very effect would not have been brought about. It follows that each mode involved in bringing about E can be understood as a partial cause of E, even if it is in principle impossible to individuate the contribution to E of any individual mode¹¹. When a mode is a partial cause, it is an inadequate cause, and its effect is only a partial effect of E.

Can such a partial effect properly be said to be the effect of some particular mode? One motivation for answering this question in the affirmative is the apparent rarity of phenomena (effects) that can clearly be attributed to a single cause. If causes may be ascribed only where an effect is to be understood through a single mode, it would appear that much of the world is inexplicable in terms of causes, hence not amenable to understanding. This is inimical to Spinoza's philosophy, which denies contingency proper (*E1p29*) and argues that things are described as contingent only "in relation to the imperfection of our knowledge" (*E1p33s1*). Complex effects have causes; even if some such causes are attributable to a single mode, most will not be. But there is nothing incoherent in saying that a cause may involve expression by many modes.

This may be illustrated by considering effects of different kinds and which modes may be involved in their causes. All individuals necessarily have what we may call spatial effects, the effects common to all bodies: they occupy space, exclude other things from the spaces they occupy, resist pressure to varying degrees, are displaced by other things, displace other things if they are moved next to them, and so forth (*E2P13s*). Obviously there are differences of degree among bodies in their capacities for bringing about these effects, depending on

¹¹ I make this stipulation simply to ensure that the emphasis remains with the partial cause; if it were possible to individuate each mode's contribution to E, and thus to identify the effect of which each was an adequate cause, it would still be the case that each mode was a partial cause of E.

their hardness and softness, robustness of composition and so forth. For example, a rock falling onto a soft surface will rebound and have only a momentary effect on that surface due to its elasticity; whereas a rock falling onto a hard surface will rebound but may also disturb the surface, producing a lasting effect of alteration. Similarly, a plant falling onto any surface is more likely than a rock to sustain some change to its own structure; and a microscopically small body so falling will have a commensurately small effect. But these differences are of degree only; these effects can all be glossed as those of motion, rest, inertia, momentum, resistance – they are effects of the same kind, that is, the common effects of bodies in space.

These effects are related to Spinoza's common notions. They are the effects necessarily brought about by what is common to all things and is equally in the part and in the whole (*E2p37*); and they are effects that any body can have, simply in virtue of the things in which all bodies agree (*E2p13l2*). They are essentially transitive effects, that is, they are effects in which a mode communicates motion and direction to other modes. As indicated above, all individuals will have this kind of effect, simply in virtue of being modes of extension. However, some individuals – notably, but not necessarily exclusively, living things – also have effects on the world which go beyond the transitive: they have what I will call transformative effects.

To elaborate: living things can be generally defined as things which go through, or have the capacity to go through, various familiar biological processes: respiration, nutrition, growth and decay, and reproduction. Further, at least some of these processes – for example, respiration and nutrition – are necessary for the living individual to be just what it is. Through biological processes, living things have effects which change how things stand in the world, both within and outside themselves: converting oxygen into carbon dioxide in the case of respiration (and carbon dioxide into oxygen, in the case of living things with the capacity for photosynthesis); converting foods into energy; creating new cells and new individuals. Living things, as complex individual

modes, therefore necessarily have phenomenal¹² transformative effects which are different in kind from the transitive effects of bodily motion.

It is clear that the very fact of going through biological processes means that living individuals may be properly described as being the causes of transformative effects in a weak sense, in that changes within them contribute to bringing about the transformations in question. In Deleuze's parlance, changes within living individuals are 'involved' in their transformative effects. My stronger claim, however, is that, in Spinoza's terms, the transformative effects brought about by living things amount to *expression* on the part of those living things: the effects that each living thing has are the results of its expressing substance in its own distinctive way. In support of this claim, I echo Deleuze's assumption that, in expression, modes are acting, even though I shall use my claim to undermine Deleuze's conclusion that modes express substance only through the adequate ideas constituting their essences.

In order to clarify this point, it is useful to revisit what Spinoza says about effects and acting. In the final proposition of Part 1 of the *Ethics*, Spinoza concludes:

Nothing exists from whose nature some effect does not follow. (E1p36)

At the start of Part 2, he seeks to expand on, or clarify, the concept of an effect in terms of an individual's acting or being acted upon:

I say that we act when something happens, in us or outside us, that is...when something in us or outside us follows from our nature, which can be clearly and distinctly understood through it alone. On the other hand, I say that we are acted on when something happens in us, or something follows from our nature, of which we are only a partial cause. (E2d2)

In certain strands of the secondary literature¹³ there often seems to be a tacit or explicit presumption that in this passage, and so throughout the *Ethics*, Spinoza

¹² At the purely metaphysical level, *ex hypothesi*, transitive and transformative effects must be of the same kind; but I take it that explanation in Spinoza's system is not intended to be confined to the non-observable.

posits a binary distinction between acting and being acted upon – in other words, that his philosophy entails that the individual, in being acted upon, becomes passive. And it is clear how this might be suggested by the primary textual source for this reading:

The actions of the mind arise from adequate ideas alone; the passions depend on inadequate ideas alone. (*E3p3*)

Chapter 4 will interrogate how adequate and inadequate ideas feature in the thinking of individual minds in Spinoza's philosophy. Here, it is sufficient to note that the exclusive interpretation seems to neglect what Spinoza has to say about the complexities involved in being a composite individual (*E2pp13-14*). And it seems to sidestep or negate the reciprocity involved in both acting and being acted upon in Spinoza's terms, as in relation to the human mind:

Our mind does certain things [acts] and undergoes other things, namely, insofar as it has adequate ideas, it necessarily does certain things, and insofar as it has inadequate ideas, it necessarily undergoes certain things. (*E3p1*)

This proposition certainly does not entail that acting and being acted upon are mutually exclusive; indeed it suggests, or at least leaves room for the possibility, that acting and being acted upon may be interdependent, rather than being conflicting descriptions of a person's state.

Further, the thought that acting and being acted upon are alternative states rather than complementary ones raises potentially paradoxical implications for Spinoza's philosophy. For if, in the terms of *E3p1*, acting involves only adequate ideas then it seems not only that non-living things do act, but that their power of acting may be considered greater than that of non-living things. For the ideas ('minds') of non-living things – rocks, tables and other phenomenally inanimate objects – comprise adequate ideas insofar as they are constituted by common notions, which are paradigmatically adequate ideas. So far, living things and non-living things are on an equal footing as to their adequate ideas. Since any individual thing acts insofar as it has adequate ideas, the effects common to all

¹³ See e.g. Bennett (1986); Kisner (2013); LeBuffe (2012).

existent individuals – taking up space, resisting impact by other modes, displacing other modes if they move, and so forth – must count as actions. But non-living things, being limited in how they can be affected, are subject to fewer encroachments on or modifications of these actions and are capable of more constantly and consistently bringing about effects that can be understood in terms of their adequate ideas and thus through their own natures. On the reading of Spinoza that understands acting and being acted upon as mutually excluding, therefore, non-living things would have to be understood as having a greater power of acting than living things. For the simpler a thing's nature, the more of its idea, proportionately, is constituted by adequate ideas, and the less it can be impeded from acting in the encounters it undergoes with other individuals.

This cannot be what Spinoza intends; or, if it is, then it must be the case that Spinoza's philosophy understands *intrinsic* power of acting as being of secondary significance to an individual's capacity for *variation* in her power of acting and, specifically, for *increasing* her power of acting. Indeed, the interpretations cited above which seek to identify Spinoza's ability to account for consciousness show this quite clearly. For the negative counterpart to the inanimate object's greater proportion of adequate ideas is its limited repertoire of ideas. The very fact that it is able to be affected in only a limited range of ways acts as an intrinsic limitation on its range of perceptions (E2p14) and thus on its repertoire of actions and effects, compared with individuals which are capable of experiencing both positive and negative variations in their power of acting.

Variation – including both increases and decreases – in power of acting involves being affected in the course of encounters with other things. However, it would do violence to Spinoza to claim that such variation *compromises* the extent to which modes can be said to act. Since expression and acting go together, expression is compatible both with modes being affected and with their being only partial causes of some of their effects: with their bringing about those effects in conjunction with other modes. This lays the ground for the next section of this chapter, in which I defend a strong interpretation of modes' transformative effects: first, that transformative effects involve expression on the

part of at least some of the modes involved in bringing them about, so that we can properly attribute the transformative effects of living things *to them*; and second, that the actions which secure transformational effects involves the *inadequate* ideas of living things.

5. Expression and Inadequate Ideas

The common notions are not the only feature shared by absolutely all individuals. At *E3p6*, Spinoza posits a further common feature of all individuals: that “Each thing, as far as it can by its own power, strives to persevere in its being”, or what is usually known as the *conatus*. The next chapter will address questions of interpretation around *conatus* and the extent to which it constitutes a substantive doctrine about action and the nature of individuals. At this point, it is only necessary to recognise that *conatus* need signify no more than a codification of what must necessarily be the case for an individual to retain and communicate its own unique ratio of motion and rest – in other words, what makes it the case that a body retains its identity as just that body¹⁴. Even on that minimalist reading, however, it is clear how *conatus* is related to acting. The individual’s unique ratio of motion and rest is an adequate idea; as such its maintenance, which constitutes the individual mode’s striving to persevere in being, is itself a process or schema of acting. Once again, though, the fact of its acting is simple, and common to all individuals, and does not in itself tell us anything about the variety of effects that are brought about by variation among existent individuals. Only differences in the capacity for being affected are candidates for explaining, understanding or accounting for such variations.

What are the implications of associating an individual’s capacity for being affected in a range of different ways with her capability for bringing about an extended repertoire of effects? To return to the rock and the plant in the earlier example: it is just as necessary that the rock strives to persevere in being, as that the plant strives to persevere in being. But there are reasons to think that the effects of the striving are different. In the case of the rock, the effect of striving is

¹⁴ I investigate the implications of inertial and teleological interpretations of *conatus* in greater detail in Chapter 3.

to bring about a steady state of the rock's existence, where the success or otherwise of the striving can be assessed on the basis of how far the rock maintains its existing size, shape and position. In the case of the plant, continuing in a steady state would not be sufficient to continue its existence. By contrast, the plant's success in persevering in being requires it to be in a constant state of change – growing new leaves, extending its roots, achieving pollination, shedding wilted flowers, and so forth. This is just what existing involves *for it*, as a living thing. Therefore, persevering in being for a living thing requires retaining its unique ratio of motion and rest in the way that will deliver the changes it needs to continue existing *qua* living thing. Critically, this requires interacting with other modes. Our plant must absorb oxygen and emit carbon dioxide; it must receive enough sunlight to photosynthesise carbon dioxide and glucose; it must take up nutrients from the soil; it may need insects in order to self-pollinate or to pollinate through exchanges with other individual plants, and so forth. So its repertoire of striving differs from the independent, resistant striving of the rock – the plant can persevere in being only by bringing about transformative effects, and it can only achieve those effects by allowing itself to be affected by other individuals¹⁵.

In other words, the extended power to act which makes possible the transformative effects characteristic of living things is a function of precisely the fact that to be a living thing is to be affected in many different ways. While non-living things persevere in being by resisting the effects of their various encounters, living things rely on encounters with other modes (air, insects, soil in the case of our plant) as the conditions which render them capable of the very actions by which they persevere in being and bring about their transformative effects. In other words, the transformative effects of living things intrinsically involve passivity and inadequate ideas.

¹⁵ Non-living things are also affected by other individuals, and their being affected may change how things stand in the world. For example, an iron bar over which water runs will rust, that is, some of the bar will gradually become iron oxide. Although this is a transformational effect, it is not the effect of either the iron bar or the water striving to persevere in being; it is irrelevant to the water, and positively harmful to the iron bar.

This brings us back to the question of the relation between acting and adequate ideas. If the striving of a living thing involves undergoing certain things, then (by *E3p1*) it must involve its forming inadequate ideas of the things which affect it. Yet striving to persevere in being is at the same time an action of the individual concerned. In other words, it seems that we have cases where an individual's most fundamental action involves inadequate ideas. If *E3p3* is taken to stand for an incompatibility between an individual's activity and passivity – if the presence of inadequate ideas and passivity is sufficient to exclude the possibility of an individual's acting – it is difficult to see how Spinoza's system could accommodate the *conatus* of a living thing and the effects it is able to bring about.

Someone might seek to block my claim that bringing about transformative effects involves living things' expression in both adequate and inadequate ideas, by arguing that the living thing is in fact an adequate cause of some of its transformative effects – namely, those which contribute to its own growth and development – and is only a partial cause of the others. Then, it might be said that the living thing acting to bring about its own development is an instance of action as adequate idea, in that what brings about the relevant transformations is the thing's adequate idea of itself, its essence; whereas the external effects that it has, such as emitting oxygen or carbon dioxide do indeed involve inadequate ideas, in that they are mere accidents, rather than effects of that individual. I counter, however, that those internal and external effects are produced by one and the same set of processes within the living thing, involving the same degrees of activity and passivity. So the objector who wishes to argue that only the adequate idea of the living thing can properly be said to be involved in its actions will need to discount all of the inadequate ideas that are involved in the individual's being affected in the ways required to bring about the effects necessary to its own development. Not only would this move deprive Spinoza's philosophy of explanatory power in relation to macro-level observable phenomena; it also raises the paradox that one and the same process is to be understood as both an action and not an action, merely on the basis of selecting one of its effects over another.

In the example of biological processes: living things are able to use, process, and transform external things, that is other modes, just in virtue of the structures of their bodies and their external and internal organs. They do it in different ways, depending on their own composition, and to different degrees of success, depending on the felicity of the circumstances. The actions required to persevere in being vary enormously among individuals, as do the conditions they require. In all cases, however, we can see that a living thing's being able to make use of or combine with other modes so as to have transformative effects does indeed involve it having *inadequate* ideas of those modes. The plant's use of sunlight in photosynthesis requires that it is both receptive and responsive to the light in the relevant way – the idea of sunlight in the plant is the idea of the sunlight only as the plant's organs receive it and then combine it with chlorophyll to produce glucose and oxygen. That is, acting to use sunlight so as to bring about the compositional changes necessary for its survival, growth and reproduction is conditional on the plant's being affected in the right ways for it to form an inadequate idea of the sunlight it encounters. And as the plant's use of sunlight in this way is an essential aspect of its nature, so the transformative effects that follow from its use of sunlight are effects of which the plant is, in the terms of *E3d2*, an adequate cause – without *that* plant's striving to persist in being, *those* effects would not happen. In other words, they can be understood only with reference to *its* nature¹⁶; and as such, are expressive of *its* essence.

By extension, the inadequate idea of sunlight formed by the plant is also expressive of the plant's – but not, of course, the sunlight's – essence. The inadequate idea of sunlight which the plant forms is also an effect, albeit not a transformational one, that the plant has. Like the effects of photosynthesis, the inadequate idea of sunlight formed by the plant is the result of the plant acting, in a context where it can be only a partial cause of the effect that follows. And like the effects of photosynthesis, the inadequate idea of sunlight formed by the plant can be understood only through the plant's nature. This is true even though the molecules of glucose and oxygen formed by the plant in photosynthesis are

¹⁶ The fact that other plants might have entirely similar effects – and indeed may be required to do so in order for the first plant to survive – does not make the effects that the first plant has any less particular to it.

qualitatively identical to those formed by other plants, and even though its inadequate idea of sunlight is qualitatively identical to that of other plants with similar organs. The effects of modes of the same kind differentiate them as individuals; while the similarities among them provide the basis for them doing, and being recognised as doing, the same things in the same way.

7. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have proposed that Deleuze's interpretation of Spinoza's metaphysics as expressionist can be put to use in resolving the question of what entities qualify as individuals in Spinoza's metaphysical system. I have further argued for an extension of Deleuze's concept of expression to inadequate ideas, in that inadequate ideas must be understood as effects of the action and expression of those individuals. This understanding of inadequate ideas shows us that, in Spinoza's philosophy, active and passive states should not be understood as mutually exclusive. Rather, activity and receptivity go together to yield the differentiation and diversity that is manifested among finite modes. In the next chapter, I put this insight to use in arguing that diversity and similarity among modes is determined by their differing affective repertoires; in Chapter 4 I bring this perspective into a reconsideration of Spinoza's epistemology.

Chapter 3

Effects and Affects

I have argued that modes are differentiated by their effects as much as their essences, and that effects are of different kinds: notably, some modes are capable of transformative effects, that is, bringing about changes beyond spatial movement. Further, such transformative effects are brought about through modes' inadequate ideas, thus challenging the Deleuzian thesis that modes express substance only in their adequate ideas. Inadequate ideas thus have extensive explanatory significance in Spinoza's philosophy: they are the basis for any account of how the world as experienced can be explained in terms of the being and actions of existent modes. The involvement of inadequate ideas in expression and its effects draws our attention to the bodily complexity of modes, and to their capacity for being affected: the experience and operation of affect is integral to an appreciation of Spinoza's philosophy.

This chapter argues that Spinoza's theorising of the affects diverges from philosophical traditions which see passion and action as opposed to each other, and that therefore the affects catalogued in Part 3 of the *Ethics* must be understood as manifestations of expression in human beings. I set the scene by looking at how Spinoza's treatment of affective phenomena contrasts with Aristotelian and Cartesian theories of emotion. I propose that all affects involve action on the part of the individual experiencing them; developing this theme, I argue that an individual's experience of affect marks a shift in *conatus*, offering new directions and possibilities for striving to persist in being. This demonstrates the involvement of affect in striving, countering the thought that affects are merely passive states. I suggest that Spinoza's philosophical treatment of affect presses us to understand it as involving receptivity and response, rather than passivity and action. This reading of modes as receptive and responsive has implications for how we should understand Spinoza's theory of knowledge which are further developed in Chapter 4.

1. The Philosophical Context of Spinoza's Treatment of Affect

Spinoza opens Part 3 of the *Ethics* by challenging those who think of the realities of emotional life in negative terms, as a weakness or failure in human beings: he suggests that “human impotence and inconstancy” (*E3Pref*) are treated by philosophers as the subject matter for abuse and regret, rather than for understanding. This is at best a partial characterisation of his philosophical precursors, however: both the Aristotelian and Cartesian traditions demonstrate an appreciation of affect as having a more nuanced role in human life. In the Aristotelian philosophy of the Scholastics, emotion could play a positive role in the good life, and therefore in promoting human flourishing; while Descartes argued that the passions were useful in indicating to the mind what external things could benefit or harm the body. Nonetheless, it is clear that Spinoza wishes his own account to be understood as distinct from either of these. In particular, he questions the philosophical validity of Descartes' *Passions of the Soul*: “I know, of course, that the celebrated Descartes...sought to explain human affects through their first causes, and at the same time to show the way by which the mind can have absolute *dominium* over its affects. But in my opinion, he showed nothing but the cleverness of his understanding...” (*E3Pref*). It is therefore useful to consider the philosophical context which motivates Spinoza's detailed analysis of the affects.

Philosophers in the Aristotelian tradition saw emotions or passions as involving bodily change brought about by a specific part of the soul. This theory of emotion was thus embedded in an overarching theoretical commitment to the soul having different faculties or functions. Further, there were two dimensions to passions: the passivity of bodily change and activity on the part of the sensitive appetite¹. Descartes, by contrast, proposed that passions *simpliciter* were volitions of intellect brought about by the movements of ‘animal spirits’ occasioned by bodily changes (*PS* §§9-13); careful application of intellect and will could make use of some passions to arrive at correct judgements about which things external to the body could benefit or harm it (*Med* 4). Descartes thus shifted the ground for philosophical understanding of the passions, from an

¹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* II 1.22

essentialist activity of the soul to a picture of automatic and quasi-mechanistic physical responses to external stimuli to be interpreted by the intellect. For both, emotions involve both passivity and activity. Passivity was associated with the body, and was to be overcome or disarmed by actions of a non-corporeal faculty. In Cartesian philosophy, exercise of the will and intellect replaced the activity of the sensitive appetite by which the Scholastics had explained emotional phenomena.

Spinoza retains some associations that initially make his writing on affect seem familiar and closer to other philosophical conceptions than the challenging tone of *E3Pref* may suggest to his readers. He ties affect to bodily change brought about by external influences: “By affect [*affectum*] I understand affections [*affectiones*] of the body by which the body’s power of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained, and at the same time, the ideas of these affections” (*E3d3*). He also holds open the possibility that an affect may be active: “If we can be the adequate cause of any of these affections, I understand by the affect an action; otherwise, a passion” (*E3d3n*). Thus, he follows Descartes in linking affect to body and bodily experience, while retaining a quasi-Aristotelian connection between emotion *per se* and action. However, his own account of affect is governed by specific theoretical commitments which give a novel twist to both of these themes. First, although Spinoza defines affect with reference to body and the body’s power of acting, the parallelism thesis (*E2p7*) entails that the bodily changes that define affect must be fully replicated in the attribute of thought, and specifically in the mind of which the body undergoing the change is the object. In other words affect does not originate in body as an object for interpretation by mind, but is fully present in both from the start. Second, human beings are a part of nature, subject to the same rule that governs everything that occurs within nature (*E1p29*); thus even active affect cannot be the self-determined imposition of some faculty of mind, but must be in principle explicable in terms of its causes or processes under the attributes of both body and mind.

Spinoza explicitly distances his philosophy of mind from the Aristotelian model and indeed from any theory that posits functional faculties of mind that

are not demonstrable from the definition of mind: “[T]here is in the mind no absolute faculty of understanding, desiring, loving, and the like...these and similar faculties are either complete fictions, or nothing but metaphysical beings, or universals, which we are used to forming from particulars” (E2p48s). This denial of specific mental capacities or functions extends to the Cartesian conception of will as separate from intellect: “In the mind there is no volition, or affirmation and negation, except that which the idea involves insofar as it is an idea” (E2p49d). In other words, Spinoza takes himself to have demonstrated that both the Aristotelian model of the soul and Cartesian free will are of no explanatory value in an understanding of human thinking, and that talk of faculties of mind merely redescribes what it purports to clarify. Thus his own account must understand affects in terms of the causes of which they are explicable effects.

2. Affect in the Human Mind

Spinoza’s project in Part 2 of the *Ethics* is to infer the properties and capacities of the mind from first principles, rather than from perceptions of what the mind appears to be or to do. Mind, therefore, must be considered in the context of Spinoza’s metaphysics and, following the Deleuzian reading of Spinoza outlined in the previous chapter, of the expression of substance by existent modes.

Spinoza proposes that a particular mind is, first of all, an idea of an existence: “The first thing which constitutes the actual being of a human Mind, is the idea of a singular thing which actually exists” (E2p11). The apparent equivocation here between some idea existing and some thing existing is deliberate: the idea of a singular thing manifests the existence and expression of a mode under the attribute of thought. Consequently, the idea of a singular thing entails that there is also a body, manifesting the existence and expression of that mode under the attribute of extension.

Thus a human being, like other modes, comprises both mind and body together, neither having ontological priority and neither capable of independent existence. Minds, therefore, are necessarily embodied; or rather, both minds and bodies can be understood only together and reciprocally, as counterparts in

thought and extension respectively. A mind is the idea of a particular body and, “Whatever happens in the object of the idea constituting the human mind must be perceived by the human mind, *or* there will necessarily be an idea of that thing in the mind” (E2p12). Thus a mind is a complex idea, or assemblage of ideas, corresponding not only to the present composition of the body which is its object but also to affections of that body arising from its physical encounters of that body. In other words, a mind is not insulated from the physical world; indeed, everything that happens in the physical world, insofar as it impacts on the body which is a mind’s object, will have an impact on the constitution of that mind.

In contrast to the Aristotelian and Cartesian accounts of soul and intellect, then, Spinoza situates the mind as being intrinsically apt for *experiencing* affect, through the ideas of changes in the body, rather than generating or modifying affect through a specific faculty or in judgements about bodily movements. This experiential account, however, should not be taken to suggest that the mind is passive, simply an assemblage of its body’s physical experiences. On the contrary, Spinoza stipulates that it is in the nature of mind to form ideas, and that in forming ideas it is active:

By idea I understand a concept of the mind which the mind forms because it is a thinking thing.

Exp: I say concept rather than perception, because the word perceptions seems to indicate that the mind is acted on by the object. But concept seems to capture and action of the mind. (E2d3)

The complex of an existent mode’s ideas, mirroring its own particular physical compositions, encounters, and recompositions, is thus at least partially the result of its own acting. In claiming this intrinsic activity of mind, however, Spinoza also draws our attention to the fact that the mind does not act from a position of perfect or privileged insight. The mind knows the body of which it is the idea only through the modifications, or affections, of that body (E2p19); as such, it does not ‘involve’ an adequate idea of the body or its parts (E2p24d). Nor does it have an adequate idea of itself; indeed, it indeed has no knowledge of itself other

than through its ideas of modifications of the mode's body (*E2p23*). The mind which necessarily forms ideas acts according to its inadequate perceptions of bodily affections; as such, its acting is shaped by its own passivity in undergoing experiences in encounters with other modes.

Following the physical interlude after *E2p13*, Spinoza moves to explain how human thinking reflects bodily movements and interactions. The mind forms its ideas of external things only through the ideas of bodily encounters – as such, its ideas of external things are determined more by the state of its counterpart body than by the things themselves (*E2p16c2*). These ideas of external things, and indeed any ideas the mind forms of its own body and of itself on the basis of bodily affections, are therefore inadequate ideas, neither resembling their objects nor giving genuine insight into how those objects affect the body (*E2p22-p29*)². Inadequate though such ideas may be, they are nonetheless both genuinely informative, a means of the mind encountering the existence of things (*E2p26cd*), and unavoidable, since the body constantly encounters other bodies and in so doing undergoes affections, the ideas of which come to be both in the mind, constitutively, and perceived by it (*E2p22*). Spinoza uses this process of the mind's forming inadequate ideas as the basis for explaining familiar features of human thinking: assuming the continued existence of things not immediately present (*E2p17d*), retaining memories of things which may no longer be, associating ideas with each other on the basis of experiencing them together (*E2p18s*). Inadequate ideas are not arbitrary but “follow with the same necessity as adequate...ideas” (*E2p36*); that is to say, once the mind has an inadequate idea, it will continue to have that idea and other ideas which have ‘followed from it’ (such as continued existence, relations between it and other ideas, and so forth) unless and until some other idea that it forms ‘excludes’ the existence or presence of the original idea.

Spinoza's account of thinking processes at *E2pp14-19* sketches a kind of mechanics of mind: of ideas following from each other in parallel with the way in

² They are, however, adequate in themselves, that is, in the mind of God which perceives them in their entirety, with all their privations. “For the mind has no other power than that of thinking and forming adequate ideas, as we have shown (by *IIIp3*, above)” (*E5p4*). This point is developed further in Chapter 4.

which bodies affect each other. The mind of an existent mode forms ideas, as it were, relentlessly and involuntarily, since every change in a mode's body results in some change, or idea in the mind. Although Spinoza stipulates that the mind acts in forming such ideas, this is certainly not the independent actions of the Aristotelian animating soul or the Cartesian intellect. Rather, the distinctive actions of Spinoza's mind are inextricable from the experiences it undergoes. I explore the implications of this further in section 4 of this chapter; for now it is simply worth noting that the fact that the mind's acting is necessarily bound up with its experiences underlines the central place of affect in Spinoza's philosophy.

3. Theorising Affect

Spinoza announces from the start that he will "consider human actions and appetites just as if it were a question of lines, planes and bodies" (*E3Pref*). As suggested above, for Spinoza the question is very much one of bodies, given that, for every affect he describes and seeks to explain, it will be necessary that there is at least a conceivable physical correlate of the emotion in question. Consequently, just as his philosophy of mind can be understood as a kind of mechanics of thinking, his exposition of how affects come about can be understood as a mechanics of affect. However, the analogy should not be taken to suggest that Spinoza is proposing a theory of bodily mechanics from which a theory of affect is derived: not only does the parallelism thesis preclude the possibility of bodies determining minds, but "no-one has yet determined what the body can do, that is, experience has not yet taught anyone what the body can do from the laws of Nature alone...the body itself, simply from its own nature, can do many things which its mind wonders at" (*E2p2s*). In other words, Spinoza denies that he or anyone has sufficient knowledge to attempt to explain the complexities of affective life through bodily mechanics.

However, it seems that parallelism does commit Spinoza to the view that there must be an idea for every change that the body undergoes and, equally, a bodily correlate for every idea in the mind. Given that the body constantly encounters other bodies, and the mind must form ideas of those encounters and

in addition forms ideas of its own ideas, it seems that there must be at work a continual dynamic of constitution and re-constitution within each mode. This also follows from the argument of Chapter 2, that modes express substance through their inadequate ideas as well as their adequate ones. Spinoza may be understood in this way: an existent mode brings about effects in responding to its encounters with other modes, and in the first instance those effects are internal to the mode, manifest in both body and mind. That is, when a mode undergoes some bodily encounter, it forms an idea of that encounter in its mind; when it forms ideas of those ideas (*E2p28s*), those ideas also have some bodily correlate. The mind's perceptions, on the basis of which it forms its ideas of ideas, are inadequate in that mind; but the ideas it forms are entities in their own right, and are therefore adequate in themselves, or in God (*E2p22d*)³. On the one hand, a mode's bodily changes are reflected in a corresponding set of ideas coming to constitute its mind; on the other, the ideas of those changes formed within its mind, which represent their objects only inadequately, are reflected in the composition of its body. In this section of the chapter, I elucidate how this compositional understanding of the implications of mind-body parallelism is necessary for an appreciation of the importance of affect in Spinoza's philosophy.

Like Descartes, Spinoza seeks to demonstrate that the full repertoire of human emotions can be explained in terms of some more basic affects. Where Descartes identifies six simple or primitive passions of wonder, love, hatred, desire, joy and sadness (*PS*§69), Spinoza confines himself to three: desire, joy and sadness. However, this is not merely a suggestion that Descartes has incorrectly classified the passions; rather, Spinoza's account is completely at odds with Descartes', in seeing emotions as determinate of a mind's power of thinking, rather than to be managed by the independent power of the intellect. This can be seen in his definitions of joy (*laetitia*) and sadness (*tristitia*):

By joy...I shall understand in what follows that passion by which the mind passes to a greater perfection. And by sadness, that passion by which it passes to a lesser perfection. (*E3p11s*)

³ This thought will be explored further in Chapter 5, on affective knowing, and in Chapter 6, on creating the political.

The concept of passing to a greater or lesser perfection here marks the occurrence of increases in the body's power of acting and the mind's power of thinking, in the case of joy, and decreases in that power, in the case of sadness (E3p11). Thus an affect of joy or sadness may be described either as a change in a mode's perfection or power, or as a mode's response to some encounter. Desire, by contrast, does not indicate a change or response in a mode, but is "appetite together with consciousness of the appetite" (E3p9s). I return to the question of desire in section 5 of this chapter; here I follow Spinoza in exploring how the various familiar, everyday affects can be explained in terms of joy or sadness, that is, increases or decreases in power or perfection.

Throughout Parts 3 and 4 of the *Ethics*, Spinoza discusses the dynamics of affect in similar terms to his treatment of the dynamics of mind in Part 2, explaining how the experience of any particular emotion named in common parlance can be explained by the mind's forming ideas of bodily encounters. In the account of affect, however, he makes clear that the mind may increase or decrease its own power in forming its ideas. Particular everyday emotions are defined and redescribed in terms of the primary affects, for example:

Love is nothing but joy with the accompanying idea of an external cause, and hate is nothing but sadness with the accompanying idea of an external cause. (E3p13s)

Pity is a sadness, accompanied by the idea of an evil which has happened to another whom we imagine to be like us. (Def.Aff.XVIII)

He also explores relations among affects: how passions reinforce, undermine, or counteract each other, in consequence of the complex multiple encounters that make up the existence of an individual mode in a world of other modes. He proceeds from the principle that the mind strives to form ideas (*imaginari conatur*) that will increase the body's power of acting (E3p12) and thus its own power of thinking; at the same time, it seeks to avoid or resist ideas that threaten it. This striving of the mind determines the individual mode's experiences of both its relationships with other modes and, relatedly, of affect: to the extent that it

has achieved a greater power of thinking, it will be in a position to exert more power in its encounters and experience more joyful affects.

The surface impression given by this account is of individual minds assailed by and participating in ideas which are not under its own control and which are likely as not to diminish, rather than increase, its power. Since ideas, including affects, follow one from another with an iron necessity, the course of particular affects can be tracked in terms of the events preceding them. Thus Spinoza sketches out general laws that describe how affects are related and the impact of these relations on the mind. This enables him to infer further definitions of affects such that the mind may appear to be entirely externally determined. However, to infer that the mind is passive in experiencing affect is to neglect Spinoza's argument that the mind acts to form ideas and strives to conceive of what will increase its own power. Doing justice to Part 3 of the *Ethics* requires recognition of both the subjection of the mind to affects in its encounters with other modes and the ways in which the mind responds to those encounters to impose its own stamp on them.

The mind will be subject to affective associations. If it has been influenced by two affects at the same time, then in future instances of experiencing one of those affects it will automatically conceive of the other as well (*E3p14d*). Objects that have given rise to an affect once will stimulate the same affect on future encounters, while different but similar objects will have the same effect on the mind. Affections of the body that do not themselves entail any change in power may yet result in affects due to past associations (*E3p15n*). Thus the mind is in no position to understand the causes of its own affects, and as such will not have even the potential to form adequate ideas of its own affective responses⁴. On the other hand, the mind does have the potential to mobilise affective associations to its own ends: because images of things past and future have as much power to affect as images of things present (*E3p18*), the mind can deploy memories which show its own power of acting, to overcome present negative or harmful affects.

⁴ Even if the philosophical thinker forms a clear and distinct idea of her affects (as Spinoza provides for in *E5pp3-4*), such as that her affect reflects the state of her own body rather than something external to it, she does not thereby form an adequate idea of it, nor does she understand its causes.

The mind's power of acting is inseparable from its understanding of other individuals in the world. It varies not only due to its own direct experiences of pleasure and pain, but also as a result of the pleasure or pain of those it loves or hates (*E3p22*). The mind will experience affects sympathetic with those of the things or people it loves, loving the things that give them pleasure or benefit them and hating whatever hurts them; it will also strive to conceive things that give pleasure to those it loves. Conversely, it will take pleasure in and strive to affirm ideas that hurt what it hates, and will be sorrowful at anything that gives joy to what it hates (*E3pp19-22*). But in the case of its affective responses to people it hates⁵, the mind suffers a paradoxical threat to its project of increasing its own power. The likeness between the mind itself and the individual hated generates an affective association between the idea of the hated person and the mind's idea of itself and its own body; consequently, the hated person's sadness causes a reciprocal sadness in the mind, even as it rejoices in that sadness (*E3p47*). So in the mind's relations with other individuals, there will be unavoidable mental conflict and pain, insofar as those relations involve hatred (*E4pp45-46*).

The mind's affective life is not only sympathetic, but also imitative: when the mind perceives that something like it is undergoing some affect, then even though the cause of that affect may not itself move the mind, the mind will experience a like affect as a result of the affect in the like thing, because the modification of a body similar to our own involves a similar modification in our own body (*E3p27*). So the mind will experience affects at a remove: if something pleasurable affects someone like it, then the mind will experience not only a vicarious pleasure as a result of that affect, but will also love the thing that brought about the pleasurable affect in the other. And the mind will likewise strive to bring about what is conducive to pleasure in those like it: it will seek to conceive of pleasurable things as present and actually existing, to increase its own power of acting both directly, through its own joy, and indirectly, by

⁵ Not necessarily people only, of course: the range of the affective response to 'like' things could encompass animals, for example, and presumably any aspect of the natural and social world. I have used the example of people to make the argument clearer.

bringing about effects that others will regard with pleasure and that will carry with them the empowering idea of oneself as cause (*E3p38d*).

The mind also is also affected by its own understanding of how others stand in relation to what the mind loves or hates. Endorsement of its own affect towards something has the effect of reinforcing and consolidating that affect towards the object and others like it, while contrary affects towards the object on the part of other, like individuals will cause the mind to vacillate and become confused. If the mind loves some thing, it will also strive to get that thing to return its love; and successfully achieving reciprocation of its love by the loved one causes the mind to “exult at being esteemed” (*E3p34*). However, if the loved one loves another more, the mind will hate the one it loves and will envy the third party (*E3p35*).

Further, the mind’s affects are themselves plastic, and liable to become modified in the course of their interactions. Our memories of things that please us cause us to strive to experience them again in the same way; but if we experience them differently, for example due to some change in circumstances or in their own affects, then our pleasure in them is partially taken away, because the existence of the original pleasure is partially excluded. On the other hand, an increase in pleasure may proportionately increase our desire, and therefore our power of acting; but an increase in pain may also have this effect, because the mind strives to conceive whatever will oppose and counteract the pain, and in so doing experiences the pleasure of its own power of acting (*E3pp13, 38*). Being hated by another causes the mind to hate in return: if the mind loves the hating other, it will both love and hate and therefore vacillate; but if it resolves itself to hate only, this hate that replaces its former love will be greater than if the other had never been loved. Hatred is increased by being reciprocated; but can be destroyed by love and can be transformed into a love greater than itself (*E3pp43-44*). And the intensity of an affect towards any thing is determined by our present conception of that thing, not by any quality or disposition of the thing itself – our affects express the state of our own minds and bodies, rather than anything about the objects to which they are directed.

Rather than a picture of unmitigated passivity on the part of a beleaguered mind, therefore, Part 3 of the *Ethics* gives us a nuanced account of affect in which the mind is responsive to its experiences. Affects interact with one another in various ways including, it seems, the mind intervening – actively but fallibly – in its own affective responses in order to increase its own power. Further, affects brought about by modifications and movements of other bodies, whilst externally generated, become part of an individual's own constitution: as such, they create the mind as it is and as it knows itself. In other words, they have enduring effects on the mind's disposition and the individual's character. The mind retains the imprint of its causal history, including its own contributions to it, and this in turn determines what kind of affective life it will experience: how it can associate new ideas with its remembrances of past affects, and whether it can mobilise joyful affects in response to sad ones. In experiencing affect a person *qua* mode is empowered or disempowered, constituted and reconstituted by undergoing and responding to encounters.

This shows the distinctiveness of Spinoza's conception of affective life. Descartes took the everyday names of various emotions and applied to them a causal narrative based on his psycho-physical theory to elaborate a systematic, generalised approach which, however, has the limiting effect of suggesting that emotional life is universal and unchanging. On Descartes' account, all human beings experience the same range of affects, in much the same way, and have always done so. Spinoza resists this thought, insisting not only that "There are as many kinds of joy, sadness and desire, and consequently of each affect composed of these...or derived from them...as there are species of objects by which we are affected" (E3p56), but also that "Each affect of each individual differs from the affect of another as much as the essence of the one from the essence of the other" (E3p57). He therefore proposes that our affective repertoire can fluctuate with our environment, responding to the richness or poverty of our encounters with other modes; and that human beings will share affective repertoire with other humans, and also potentially with other modes, just to the extent that they are similar. A philosophical understanding of affect, for Spinoza, must be grounded

in an appreciation of the ontological standing of modes and their differentiation, rather than of some function of a soul or intrinsic human nature.

This gives a reflexive and iterative character to both the experience of affect itself and, more broadly, the development of mind. First, a person's mind is constituted by ideas which reflect the encounters and experiences she has undergone and how she has responded to them. This complex of ideas itself will in turn determine her further receptivity to experiences and her responses to them; as such, her mind is successively constituted and re-constituted by her experiences and responses. This means that Spinoza can speak colloquially of determinate character traits and types – such as the miser, the ambitious man and the envious man (*E3p39s*) – while maintaining a formal framework in which affective life for each individual develops and emerges according to the experiences she undergoes over time. In characterising affective repertoire as dynamic and experiential, Spinoza avoids any suggestion that the phenomenal emotions have stable and consistent characteristics, keeping the focus of his theory on the underlying realities of a mode's undergoing and responding to encounters with other modes.

4. Affects as Active

While the passivity in Spinoza's account of affect has been extensively explored in the secondary literature, its activity receives less attention, other than the invocation in Part 5 of the *Ethics* of the pure joy associated with acting from adequate ideas (*E5pp4-5*). In this section, I propose that, notwithstanding the inextricably passive element in affect, Spinoza's philosophy presses us to understand affects themselves as actions of a mode: not as mere effects brought about in a mode in the course of its encounters with other modes but, rather, as effects which a mode brings about in itself and which may have further effects on others. I develop the argument of the previous section that a mode is to be understood as constituted and reconstituted by constantly undergoing encounters with other modes and responding to such encounters by forming its own ideas of those encounters.

Affects are ideas, but in various different ways. First, and most obviously, the names given to affects – hope, fear, pity, indignation – signify ideas brought under shared social concepts. But affects are also ideas at a more fundamental level. On the one hand, an affect is the mind's perception of a bodily affection arising from some encounter or change; on the other, it is also the existent idea of that encounter or change, which enters into the mind's constitution. In other words, there is both an epistemological aspect and an ontological aspect to affect. So it seems that an affect is an even more complex state of affairs than the outline of Spinoza's framework in the previous section suggests; and that the relation of affects to activity, passivity and power stands in need of further consideration.

In Spinoza's terms, the conceptualised ideas of affects – love, fear, and so forth – are universal terms, bringing together the images or ideas of numerous incidences of emotion taken to be similar to each other, when their expression is compared across different individuals (*E2p40s1*; *E3p57*). As such, the names given to affects are neither identical with the affects themselves, nor even consistently applied: they are clearly inadequate ideas. Indeed, they are inadequate ideas of inadequate ideas, in that an affect in the mind of an individual is itself the inadequate idea constituted by the mind's perception of some encounter. The affection, or change, which that bodily encounter brings about is reflected in a corresponding idea, or change, in the constitution of the mind; this idea, which is adequate as it is related to God (*E2p32*) is in principle inaccessible to the individual whose body experiences the encounter (*E2p28*). So an individual existent mode undergoes some encounter with another mode, in the course of which its body is affected, or altered in some way; in relation to both this bodily affection and the counterpart idea of the affection, the mode is passive. In at least some instances, the mode acts to form an idea of the encounter; its idea, though adequate in the mind of God, is both inadequate in relation to its object, and is only inadequately perceived by the mode itself (*E3p11c*). Thus even a mode's acting is only partial, that is, it involves passivity as well as activity (*E3p3s*).

Part 3 of the *Ethics* should therefore prompt reflection on what it means for a mode to be passive or active in relation to some affect. Under the terms of *E3d3*

an affect *qua* idea of a bodily affection may be active if the mode can be its adequate cause. From Spinoza's account of the situation of the human mind, we may well be led to infer that such a situation is exceptional, if not entirely implausible. However, much turns on what the concept of an 'adequate cause' is taken to require. Here I argue that this can be clarified by thinking of an adequate cause in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. An adequate cause is one whose effects can be clearly and distinctly understood through it (*E3d1*). However, like modes, effects may be complex and constituted of many elements which, though inextricably connected, are distinguishable one from another. A complex effect like a work of art, or a meal, does not have one single cause – at the macro level, its adequate cause would be all of the different elements that needed to come together to bring it into being. But, *ex hypothesi*, the effect could in principle be understood in terms of its constituent elements, each of which has its own adequate cause. In other words, a mode may be an adequate cause without there being some effect at the phenomenal level which can be attributed to that mode alone – that is, without being a sufficient condition for any observable effect. In order for a mode to be an adequate cause, it is enough that some effect would not have come about without that very mode, such that the mode is a necessary condition for that effect. Thus we can say that a mode acts, on the terms of *E3d3*, in respect of any effect of which it is a necessary condition.

I argued in Chapter 2 that complex modes such as living things bring about transformative effects which, by their very nature, cannot be understood through the nature of any single mode. That is, a living thing brings about the very effects which are distinctive of *it* only through undergoing encounters and interactions with other modes of varying kinds. If the criterion for adequate causation demands that a mode be a sufficient condition of its effect, then a complex mode could never be considered to be acting in bringing about its distinctive effects. However, I argued that in fact a living thing is a necessary condition of its transformative effects, since those distinctive effects would not come about in the absence of that mode and understanding them requires understanding the nature of the mode. Taking the adequate cause provision at

E3d3 as imposing a sufficient condition requirement on acting makes our understanding insensitive to the manifold complexities of the world, and is unduly restrictive of our ability to make sense of the many things that modes do in fact bring about. Therefore, I propose that in Spinoza's system a mode can and should be considered an adequate cause if it is a necessary condition for some effect.

Thus complex modes are only ever the partial cause of their effects (E3d2); but this does not detract from the thought that their effects must be explained through – that is, by taking account of – the nature of that very mode. And affects may be seen as examples of such effects: of modes acting in response to encounters with other modes, by forming ideas which posit increases in their own power of action, albeit with no guarantee of success.

As discussed in section 3 of this chapter, an affection of a human body has its counterpart in the attribute of thought, the *adequate* idea of that affection entering into the constitution of the mind that is the idea of that body. This adequate idea is not an action of that mind, but neither is it an action imposed on it by some other mode and, as such, entailing its passivity; rather, it is an action of the mind of God, or an expression of substance. The human mind of which this adequate idea now becomes a part does not have adequate knowledge of the affection; the adequate idea of the affection remains epistemically opaque to the very mind into whose constitution it enters. However, the mind perceives the adequate idea of the bodily affection (E2p22) and forms its own, inadequate, idea of it, which may or may not enter into the individual's *conscious* thought, and of which the mind may in turn form further inadequate ideas (*idea ideatum*)⁶. It is the various permutations of these inadequate ideas of affections that give rise to the experiences and phenomena named as affects in everyday language.

The inadequate ideas constituting an affect are concepts formed by the mind of the individual experiencing the affect. As such, they are brought about by

⁶ For different accounts of the significance of *ideae ideatum* see Curley (1969); Balibar (2013).

it and to be understood only through it. In this way, Spinoza shows that a philosophical understanding of affect or passion must appreciate both that the very phenomenon to be explained is an inadequate idea and as such involves passivity, and that an affect also involves activity on the part of the individual experiencing it: The philosophical investigation of affect becomes a project of identifying the active aspects of affect in the context of the encounters a mode must undergo in order to be what it is and bring about its characteristic effects. In the next section, I argue that this is clarified by Spinoza's treatment of desire.

5. Desire as an Active Principle

The derivation of the definition of Desire emphasises both its necessary embodiment and its significance for Spinoza's concept of *conatus*, or striving to persist in being:

[S]ince the mind (by IIP23) is necessarily conscious of itself through ideas of the body's affections, the mind (by P7) is conscious of its striving, q.e.d.. (E3p9d)

When this striving is related only to the mind it is called will; but when it is related to the mind and body together, it is called appetite. This appetite, therefore, is nothing but the very essence of man... Between appetite and desire there is no difference, except that desire is generally related to men insofar as they are conscious of their appetite. So desire can be defined as Appetite together with consciousness of the appetite. (E3p9s)

This definition of desire stands in need of some unpacking. Appetite is defined as a striving involving both mind and body, which already involves (self)consciousness through the mind's ideas of bodily affections. The question therefore arises as to how the separate concept of desire, with its further layer of consciousness, comes into play: what purpose does it serve for Spinoza to stipulate that desire involves specifically a consciousness of appetite, that is, a mode's consciousness of its consciousness of some bodily change?

In one influential reading addressing this difficulty, Koistinen (2009) seeks to explicate the position by suggesting that we understand the consciousness

involved in desire as a consciousness of the *objects* of desire. He illustrates this with an example: hunger is a physical change in the stomach accompanied by a conscious uneasiness identified with the stomach; it is therefore an appetite related to both mind and body, but not yet a desire. Desire enters the picture only with some elaboration of the appetite: in this case, when the hungry person knows that food will ease her hunger. In this interpretation, appetite is a primitive state of bodily awareness, whereas desire is a second-order, goal-oriented state, involving consciousness of the object of the appetite.

Koistinen's exposition of desire as directed toward those external objects which will satisfy it fits well with Spinoza's picture of individual modes as existing and expressing substance only in relation to other modes, as part of nature; it also echoes the stipulation that we judge things as good only on the basis of our desire for them (*E3p9s*). It offers the prospect of being able to accommodate variations in desire among different kinds of beings and among individuals of the same kind, without having to resort to different definitions of desire itself: if desire is goal-oriented then it is possible to understand why it should manifest itself in markedly different ways, depending on how each individual is constituted. However, Koistinen's differentiation between desire and appetite seems stronger than warranted by Spinoza's text. *E3p9s* suggests that there is no difference between appetite and desire other than in how the words are usually applied, which seems to present some difficulties for Koistinen's intuitively appealing two-level interpretation. If there is no real difference between appetite and desire, then it seems that there cannot be a categorical distinction under which desire is object-oriented and appetite is not, since this would entail that an instance of appetite and its corresponding desire must comprise different ideas, or sets of ideas, formed by the desiring individual, and this would negate their identity. Further, Spinoza explicitly allows for desire which is not object-oriented, in those affects where the mind understands clearly and distinctly (*E3p59*): strength of character (*fortitudo*) can be manifested as either tenacity (*animositas*) or nobility (*generositas*), each of which is defined both as desire and as striving solely from the dictates of reason (*E3p59s*), to persevere and to cooperate with others respectively. Perseverance and

cooperation are not objects of desire, but outcomes or effects of striving according to the dictates of reason alone; thus the desire involved in tenacity and nobility does not have objects in the sense which Koistinen's analysis requires. As Spinoza does not draw a distinction between desire in these affects and in others, or have the theoretical resources to draw such a distinction, it is problematic to construe the concept of desire in Part 3 of the *Ethics* as intrinsically object-oriented.

Rather, we may see Spinoza's characterisation of desire as marking the coexistence of activity and passivity in human existence. Koistinen is right to press us to think of desire as externally-oriented, rather than externally determined; his emphasis on the orientation of desire helps to foreground the importance of understanding striving as contextualised. The desire which operates as a primary affect involves human existence in all its complexity – “any of a man's strivings, impulses, appetites and volitions...which are not infrequently so opposed to one another that the man is pulled in different directions” (*E3Def.Aff.1*) – but we are aware of striving only in relational contexts: striving towards, striving against, striving to avoid, striving to attain and so forth. Desire *qua* primary affect, then, is the means by which Spinoza demonstrates how affect involves both the passivity of undergoing encounters with other modes and the activity of forming ideas of those encounters.

It is a defining feature of Spinoza's account that individual, embodied human beings are at all times in a state of passivity, and that this is reflected in their affects: in their responses to their encounters with external bodies, including other people. Indeed, as argued in Chapter 2, this capacity for being affected by other modes is to a great extent what defines a mode and differentiates it from others. However, Spinoza's analysis of affect draws our attention to the presence of the active principle in affective life. First, that affects may be wholly active: as when the mind experiences pleasure and increases its power in the process of contemplating its adequate ideas (*E3p58s*), or strives without pain (*E3p59*). Second, and more pervasive, that all of a mode's affects have some active content: affects are complex ideas and, to the extent that they can be properly attributed to some particular mode, they bear the signature of

that mode's activity. I have argued in this section that Spinoza's characterisation of desire as a primary affect presses us to understand that any affect may be understood as active insofar as it involves activity on the part of the mode, and that all affects involve some such activity, simply in the fact of a mode's forming the idea (however inadequate) that constitutes the affect. In the terms of section 4 of this chapter, then, we can say that any affect is at least partially an action on the part of the mode experiencing the affect: it involves something happening, both in the individual mode and in the effects it has on others, that follows from its own nature, the clear and distinct understanding of which would require that very mode as an explanatory factor. In other words, there is more to an affect than the affection from which it derives: affect certainly involves passivity in a mode's undergoing encounters with other modes, but the affect which is the object of philosophical investigation necessarily involves a mode's acting.

6. Striving, Expression and Essence

I have argued for a reading of Spinoza's theory of affect on which all affects include at least some active element; and I have suggested that this interpretation follows from the concept of striving or *conatus* of which, Spinoza holds, we are conscious in experiencing desire. This raises the question of whether *conatus* itself contributes any particular content to affect: whether, in placing *conatus* at the centre of affective life, Spinoza is appealing (overtly or implicitly) to some substantive concept of essence which confers a distinctive character on the human experience of affect, not available to other modes. In this section, I consider different recent interpretations of Spinoza's *conatus* which are divided as to whether it should be understood as an explicitly or implicitly teleological concept. I make use of the interpretation for which I argued in Chapter 2, that a mode's inadequate ideas are expressive, to show that recognising the effects of a mode's inadequate ideas as *its* effects makes a teleological reading of the *Ethics* redundant.

Garrett (1999) holds that, under *E3p7*, we must read Spinoza as having in mind a form of Aristotelian teleology on which *conatus* is the expression of essence and hence of a natural thing's developing according to a pre-determined

pattern that makes it the thing it is. Under Garrett's reading, self-preservation for each thing mandates certain strivings, those which will enable the thing to continue in being as the distinctive kind of thing it is, and prohibits other which would impede its continuation. This interpretation is challenged by Carriero (2005) who points out, first, that the concept of *conatus* in Spinoza is neither confined to living things nor reliant on final causes and, second, that Spinoza's systemic philosophy and intellectual involvement with the emergence of mechanical science suggest that *conatus* should shadow the principles set out in the physical digression following *E2p13*; these considerations lead to a view of *conatus* as analogous to a principle of inertia⁷. Similarly, Viljanen (2011) contends that the concepts of striving and even essence in Spinoza's writing may be understood in terms of causal powers which necessarily bring about certain effects, enabling an interpretation that preserves the idea of modes' inherent development without a requirement for teleology. More recently, Sangiacomo (2015) agrees that Spinoza's *conatus* is free of explicit teleological commitments, but argues that Spinoza's ontological framework, specifically the stipulation that everything strives to enhance its own power, requires that *conatus* behaves teleologically – that is, enacts or exemplifies a teleological orientation – in modes.

Sangiacomo criticises Viljanen's interpretation on the grounds that it violates Spinoza's ontology of modes as dependent and determined by tacitly appealing to a concept of essence such that the ideal state of a mode would be to remain unaffected:

Viljanen's account is based on the assumption that external causes play only a 'negative role in Spinoza's ontology. In fact, Viljanen defines the state of 'perfect essence realisation' as the condition that the thing would reach if it were *not* acted upon (and prevented by) external causes. (2015, p62)

As an alternative, Sangiacomo proposes that *conatus* is apt for being affected and indeed that a mode's *conatus* is intrinsically orientated towards maximising that mode's agreement in nature with external causes, that is, with other modes. He

⁷ But not in the sense of being the analogue in the attribute of thought to inertia in the attribute of body: *conatus* is present in the existence of modes, not in a single attribute.

argues against Spinoza's holding any concept of essence that could define an existent mode as an individual in advance of, and independently from, any considerations of its potential to adapt itself to others. The essential striving of such a mode would be a striving of whatever it is that differentiates it from (the essences of) other modes, such that each mode would be in continual conflict with all other modes, fostering disagreement in a way detrimental to its own *conatus*. Viljanen's (or indeed any) concept of the pre-relational striving individual mode therefore contains within itself the paradox that its very striving to persevere in being is liable to bring about its own destruction. Rather, Sangiacomo argues that even if we consider each mode as having "a fixed set of effects [it] can (and necessarily will) bring about" (p63), there are different ways in which the effects in question may be produced. On this view, a mode brings about its effects through its encounters and relations with others:

...the only way the thing can persevere in being consists in its being determined to 'adapt' its causal activity to the nature of external causes by enhancing their degree of agreement in nature (because the more disagreement in nature prevails, the more the thing's existence will be opposed). (p64)

The concept of disagreement in nature is therefore mobilised by Sangiacomo to undermine essentialist readings of Spinoza, both teleological and non-teleological, by demonstrating that such readings generate a vicious circle which, paradoxically, will eventually result in the mode's destruction; conversely, a reading which associates a mode's striving with seeking out agreement in nature gives a virtuous circle in which a mode striving to persevere in being necessarily also enhances its own power. Underpinning this seeking of agreement, Sangiacomo argues for a 'teleological orientation' in modes, on which a mode increases its own power through agreement in nature, not as a matter of serendipity but because its causal powers are intrinsically directed towards that goal:

In this sense, the thing's *conatus* is not only ruled by efficient causality, but also by a kind of 'teleology' that orients the thing's causal efficiency towards a specific state compatible with the preservation *and* enhancement of the thing's power of acting. (p64)

Ultimately, each mode strives towards a state of maximum possible agreement and minimum possible disagreement with external causes (other modes), which Sangiacomo characterises as a state of equilibrium: it represents the optimal state of affairs for that mode. The equilibrium state cannot be defined by the mode's essence, but it follows from its *conatus*, "since reaching equilibrium is the only way in which the thing can preserve and enhance its existence" (p65). Sangiacomo argues that this understanding of *conatus* reveals how externally-determined modes may be said to meet Spinoza's criterion for acting, in that the mode's striving for equilibrium follows from its nature or essence alone: he suggests that, since the equilibrium state itself does not follow from the mode's nature alone but from how its nature plays out within the totality of determining causes, Spinoza's concept of activity should be understood as relational.

Sangiacomo's appeal to teleology is grounded in a concern that efficient causality alone is insufficient to account for a mode's striving; specifically, that it cannot show how a mode perseveres in being in situations where external causes are overwhelmingly such as to diminish the mode's power of acting. His proposal that a teleological orientation of each mode, to enhance its own power of acting, mobilises the active principle in Spinoza's philosophy to make sense of a mode persevering in such adverse circumstances, rather than ceasing to be. I agree with Sangiacomo's view that Spinoza's use of the concept of essence does not assume any prior capacity or disposition in modes to overcome adverse encounters with other modes, and that the concept of activity defined at *E3d3* is relational. I propose, however, that the 'teleological orientation' which Sangiacomo invokes to account for modes' perseverance in being can also be dispensed with, if affects are understood as at least partially active, expressive of substance and constitutive of striving, as argued in sections 3 and 4 of this chapter.

The derivations of definitions for the various affects in Part 3 of the *Ethics* show that Spinoza is rigorous about using a mechanistic approach to his explanations of how affects come about. The phenomenological experience of affect follows necessarily from events and associations which can be tracked, whether or not they are transparent to the individual. From this, we see

Spinoza's absolute commitment to the explicability and demystification of affect, and to the principle of parallelism, that "the order or connection of things is one, whether Nature is conceived under this attribute or that; hence the order of actions and passions of our body is, by nature, at one with the order of actions and passions of the mind" (E3p2s) such that attributes must mirror one another.

Given these commitments, even the minimal teleological orientation proposed by Sangiacomo as an explanation of *conatus* seems to go further than warranted⁸. For this reason, I return to the thought that *conatus* is effectively a principle of inertia, generalised across attributes in the existence and expression of modes. The concept of inertia was integral to the developing mechanistic science of Spinoza's time, and Descartes had included an argument for it in the *Principles of Philosophy* (PrII.37). The principle of bodies being either in motion or at rest is the starting point for the physical interlude at E2p13, and at Lemmas 3-4 Spinoza elaborates some principles as to how this plays out in encounters between bodies, again in mechanistic terms. I suggest that we should take the principles of the physical interlude as the basis for how we should think of *conatus* – not as imposing some otherwise unaccountable orientation or direction belonging to a mode, but just as the principle that, other things equal, a mode continues to be what it is, whatever that requires. In the case of the simplest bodies, they maintain their unique ratios of motion and rest; in the case of a human being, success in persevering in being requires all the things that are necessary for continuing in existence as a human being, including bodily features such as a steady state of blood circulating, a heart beating, a pancreas secreting hormones, cells dividing and so forth. Clearly, attributing such features to *conatus*, or to the effects of a mode's essence, would require conceding a strong version of teleology under which every biological process necessary for human life would be part of a person's *conatus*.

⁸ Quite apart from the fact that, according to Spinoza's exposition of the affects, we often do things that in fact diminish our own power, even as we seek to enhance it. Admittedly, Sangiacomo can account for this by holding to an interpretation of affects as wholly passive. But then it seems as though affects are something apart from the mode 'in itself', considered as active and oriented towards its own survival; and this lends itself to the thought that modes would in all cases be better left undisturbed – precisely the thought which Sangiacomo wishes to oppose.

Like other living things, a human being cannot even *theoretically* continue in a steady state, uninterrupted by encounters with other things: in order to maintain all the things that amount to a steady state *for them*, even considered at the minimal organic level, human beings must breathe, and take in and digest food and water; and also move their limbs against resistance, be exposed to sunlight, and so forth. In other words, even a strongly teleological, quasi-Aristotelian view of *conatus* as unfolding the human being's essence in existence would fail to establish that a person could persevere in being successfully without undergoing encounters with external things. Further, the very same encounters which are necessary for the person's continued existence nonetheless constitute *interruptions* to her own steady state, or *conatus* – they are encounters that, in the analogy with mechanics, *deflect* a mode from its inertial trajectory. So they cannot be assimilated to a teleological account *conatus*, any more than they can be excluded from an account of what it means for human beings and other living things to persevere in being.

My proposal is that this conception of disruption as a necessary aspect of a mode's striving is sufficient to show that Spinoza's philosophy has the resources to account for modes' persevering in being, without the need for even Sangiacomo's minimal concession of a teleological orientation for modes. In that all encounters are disruptive, they all have the potential to result in decreases, as well as increases, in a mode's power of acting. Therefore, there is no more difficulty in accounting for a mode's persevering in being through negative encounters (with air pollution, or poison, or enemies) than through positive encounters (with oxygen, or nutritious food, or good company), since there is no fundamental distinction between the encounters themselves. In all encounters, the mode does just what it can in response to the affections engendered by those encounters, forming the inadequate, but nonetheless partially active, ideas which are expressive of its desire and the empowerment or disempowerment it experiences in the encounter. Then it is clear that its persevering in being,

together with its acting, is indeed a relational matter, but does not require any specific orientation⁹.

7. Conclusion: Receptivity, Affect and Striving

I have argued that affects, as inadequate ideas, should be understood as manifestations of a mode's striving or activity, even though the mode is to a greater or lesser extent passive in undergoing the encounters which originate those ideas. Any mode, in responding to an affection, is acting: its *conatus* brings about some effect, internally or externally. Such effects, although partly explicable through the other modes involved in the encounter, cannot be understood without reference to that existent mode: in that the mode is a necessary condition for the effect, the effect can be fully explained only through its nature. To conclude this chapter, I argue that affects are not only active as responses: in addition, the receptivity which makes the affect possible and serves as a determinant of the affect should also be understood as involving activity on the part of the mode.

To defuse the apparent paradox of receptivity being considered as active, it is useful to revisit the account of how ideas arise in the mind, in Part 2 of the *Ethics*. The human mind forms "ideas of affections by which the body is affected" (E2p19), and these are the basis for its knowledge of both itself and the body which is its object (E2pp12-13, p23). The receptivity which is the basis for a mode's affective repertoire, therefore, is necessarily present in body as well as mind. All bodies agree in certain things (E2p13L2), and what is common to all things can only be conceived adequately (E2p38). Consequently, any mind has some adequate ideas, simply in its constitution as the idea of the existing singular thing that is the body (E2p11). So Spinoza's provision that "The actions of the mind arise from adequate ideas alone; the passions depend on inadequate ideas alone" (E3d3n) brings with it the thought that activity is intrinsic to the very existence of a mode, rather than requiring any special stimulus or acquisition of second-order ideas to bring it about.

⁹ There is, however, more to be said about the development of the mode's capacity for forming inadequate ideas. Chapters 4 and 5 take up this theme.

Spinoza's association between the complexity of a mode's body and its capacity for being affected should not, therefore, be read as a simple read-across from the body's spatial properties and the way it is present in the mode of extension. Although affective potential does indeed entail this passive aspect – under which, as I showed in Chapter 2, a complex mode's very vulnerability confers on it a greater affective repertoire – it also involves the mode's activity. Spinoza explains that, in striving to persevere in being, the human mind acts by imagining or remembering so as to increase its receptivity to what will enhance its power of acting (*E3p12*) and to shut out what will diminish it (*E3p13*). This does not imply that the passive aspect of being affected is somehow eliminable – indeed, Spinoza explicitly says that it is not (*E4p4*) – but it shows that Spinoza's theory of affect comprehensively breaks with the philosophical tradition of conceptualising emotion or affect as a merely passive state. It also entails that the capacity for being affected is not static, for an individual's striving has effects not only on external things but also on her own receptivity and resilience.

I have argued in this chapter that the apparent tension between activity and passivity within Spinoza's philosophy indicates the originality and centrality of his theory of affect. First of all, it is original in embedding a passive element into mind, that is, making passivity an essential and productive element in mind rather than an incidental and/or regrettable feature of imperfect individuals. This is why Spinoza can confidently say in the preface to Part 3 of the *Ethics* that passions are neither anomalous nor aberrant but rather, as natural phenomena, a proper focus for investigation and understanding. Second, affectivity – that is, passivity as manifested in the disruption or deflection of the direction of an individual's striving – is an essential element in some modes' ability to bring about the effects that they do. Passivity, or rather receptivity, is necessary for complex individuals to bring about their distinctive effects, including those which keep them in being. A mode, therefore, is what it is in virtue of its encounters and the effects it undergoes, not in virtue of something essential about its *conatus*. The next chapter will develop this theme in the context of Spinoza's epistemology, arguing that inadequate ideas are an ineliminable and creative aspect of human knowing.

Chapter 4

Mind, knowledge and knowing

In this chapter I examine the development of Spinoza's epistemology, culminating in the mature theory of the *Ethics*, and argue that Spinoza's philosophy of mind is fundamental to an appreciation of the force of his epistemology. I defend interpretations of the epistemology outlined in the *Ethics* which draw attention to the centrality of experience in Spinoza's account of the enterprise of improving and extending knowledge. The chapter proposes that knowledge in Spinoza's philosophy is integrated with the ontology of mind, and demonstrates how this interpretation sheds light on the epistemological significance of the common notions and Spinoza's three kinds of knowledge. I argue that reading Spinoza's epistemology through the lens of his distinction between adequate and inadequate ideas reveals all our knowledge claims as hybrids of imagination, reason and *scientia intuitiva*. This shifts the emphasis of Spinoza's epistemology from a search for criteria or standards for what counts as knowledge to an investigation into the phenomenon of human knowing.

The opening sections of the chapter raise some concerns about different interpretations of Spinoza's epistemology. In section 2 I take issue with commentators who have seen Spinoza as philosophically interested in the capacities and deliverances of reason alone, and who have consequently tended to see imagination as of marginal or no significance in Spinoza's concept of philosophical knowledge. I endorse the focus of more recent interpretations which give greater prominence to the place of imagination in Spinoza's thought, while questioning their continued tendency to see the three kinds of knowledge identified in *E2p40s2* as both separable and largely separate in Spinoza's theory of knowledge. Section 3 examines the evolution of Spinoza's theory of knowledge, arguing that the epistemological framework of the *Ethics* differs fundamentally from that seen in the earlier *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*. Section 4 shows how Spinoza's philosophy of mind presses us to draw

a distinction between ideas as constitutive of minds and ideas as available to reflective thought; section 5 uses this insight to argue for a minimalist interpretation of the ‘common notions’ of *E2p37* and to illustrate the extent of Spinoza’s challenge to Cartesianism by showing that human beings’ extensive epistemic repertoire is entirely a matter of embodied knowledge. Section 6 puts forward my thesis that all human knowledge claims are instances of our ‘hybrid knowing’, comprising both adequate and inadequate ideas and rendering redundant the distinction between the three kinds of knowledge. Rather, the ‘kinds of knowledge’ are necessarily integrated in the enterprise of human knowing: that is, experience, reasoning and insight are all indispensable to the pursuit and development of knowledge, including philosophical knowledge.

1. Knowledge and Reason: (Mis)Interpreting Spinoza

It is undeniable that both the geometric structure of the *Ethics* and Spinoza’s style of writing may prompt the thought that Spinoza’s philosophical project is concerned primarily with showing the superiority of reason as a ‘kind of knowledge’ and with seeking to know through reason rather than imagination. The geometric method gives the *Ethics* the appearance of an enterprise of reason, moving from (purportedly) self-evident axioms, through a deductive argumentative structure to conclusions that are thereby meant to be certain. The way in which Spinoza alludes to reason can be read as according it a special status: “all who know clear reason to be infallible” (*E1p15s*); “it is in the nature of reason to perceive things truly” (*E2p44d*); “men are moved more readily by opinion than by true reason” (*E4p17s*). Further, the metaphysical theses of the *Ethics* are set out in a way which may suggest that reason enjoys a privileged epistemological status in having an intrinsically close relation to reality: since everything that exists is determined in a process of expression and effect, and the causal order within the attribute of thought mirrors that within the attribute of extension (*E2p7*), any way of knowing that can lay claim to structural similarity with ‘the order and connection of things’ seems apt to claim a unique suitedness for tracking the true relations between things. This is the thought that has led some commentators to suggest that Spinoza’s theory of knowledge is highly restricted, such that knowledge, properly delimited, consists in all and

only those propositions that can be deduced directly from the self-evident first principle of a single substance. Parkinson, for example, claims that “for [Spinoza], anything other than deductive knowledge is not, strictly speaking, worthy of the name of ‘knowledge’” (1993, p20). He suggests that the epistemological force of the *Ethics* is that, “ideas which are true constitute a deductive system, and one can best direct one’s search for new truths by reflecting on this system” (1993, p14). In other words, Parkinson interprets Spinoza as holding that knowledge should aspire to the epistemological model of mathematics, where mathematics is understood as an *a priori* discipline – and, by implication, that the propositions of the *Ethics* are intended to exemplify (perhaps even to exhaust) that which can be properly called knowledge. Similarly, Lin (2009) argues that Spinoza confines rational ideas to those that can be deduced from the mind’s innate ideas of common properties and of God, and that these offer the only basis for extending our knowledge, properly understood.

One obvious problem with such interpretations is that confining knowledge to truths known and knowable by deduction from true premises seems to pose insuperable obstacles to the enterprise of acquiring knowledge, particularly knowledge of things in nature. Parkinson sees this as a fundamental weakness in Spinoza’s philosophy, limiting its epistemological force: he argues that Spinoza’s theory of knowledge amounts to first asserting that Nature should be treated as a deductive system and then listing those propositions that can be known *a priori*. He points out that, “when this is attempted, Spinoza’s methodology shades off into an account of what he thinks the universe is like, and so becomes hard to distinguish from his metaphysics” (1993, p21). The suggestion is that Spinoza’s epistemology is impoverished by prior metaphysical and methodological commitments. But given Spinoza’s well-documented engagement with contemporary science it seems implausible to think that he would have been oblivious to this as a problem in his philosophy. If the project of attaining knowledge through deduction alone would be as manifestly unproductive as Parkinson suggests, then that in itself seems to give good grounds for revisiting Spinoza’s discussions of knowledge.

In fact, there is now a substantial body of commentary which foregrounds other aspects of Spinoza's writings on knowledge. Curley played a significant part in opening up these lines of investigation in works which drew attention to the role of experience in Spinoza's writings on knowledge (1973) and which sought to demystify Spinoza's philosophical system by addressing the content of the *Ethics* independently of its structure (1988). He argues that Spinoza's discussions of knowledge in both the *Ethics* and the earlier *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* trade significantly on items of knowledge that can be gained only through experience. He also makes a strong case for Spinoza having adopted geometric structure as merely a paradigm of clear, ordered argument, with the principal aim of clarifying and critiquing central concepts and arguments in Cartesian philosophy; the plausibility of this suggestion is reinforced by widespread admiration for the clarity and truth-preserving qualities of geometrically-ordered reasoning in the Early Modern period. This makes it possible to view the geometric structure of the *Ethics* as a presentational matter, in which Spinoza can be seen to be exhibiting the rigour of his arguments and laying claim to philosophical credibility, rather than proposing this style of argument as a model or paradigm to which knowledge should aspire. In such a picture, there is no need to impute to Spinoza even a particular attachment to geometric reasoning as such, and much less a philosophical position which restricts the designation 'knowledge' to what can be known through deduction from any first principle, or which places confidence only in deductive arguments.

Gatens and Lloyd (1999) go further than Curley, in attributing to imagination a constructive function in the formation of knowledge and a capacity for giving a greater force to reason and for developing effective powers of reasoning. In their account, imagination shifts from being a lesser way of knowing, whose ideas – if our philosophical endeavours are successful – should in due course be replaced by ideas of reason, to take a distinctive and positive role in human thought. Imagination becomes a positive and creative power: exercised under the guidance or discipline of reason, it can provide the resources to critique and transform problematic ways of life so as develop new ways for

people to improve both their material conditions and their knowledge. Other philosophers (James (2010, 2011); Balibar (1998); Negri (1991)) have also shown how Spinoza uses imaginative knowledge in his political philosophy to explain social and political developments and to envisage new possibilities. In such readings of Spinoza, imagination is not a hindrance or limit to knowledge, but a valuable resource of the human mind; the project of knowing is framed not as one of discovering truths that are, as it were, already there, but as playing a part in both extending understanding and bringing about new realities.

These readings, viewing Spinoza's theory of knowledge through the lens of imagination in order to demonstrate its originality and strengths, are compelling; however, they have been criticised for stripping Spinoza's epistemology of its normative force by sidelining or ignoring the role of adequate ideas (e.g. Rubin (2003); LeBuffe (2010, 2018)). The worry here is that a focus on imaginative knowledge, while delivering a way of understanding Spinoza that provides a useful and persuasive context for his political thought, loses the full significance of the relation between Spinoza's metaphysics and his epistemology. Rubin states the problem succinctly:

None of this work should blind us to the status of the imagination in Spinoza. The imagination is necessarily *inadequate*...Imagination is the domain of *servitude*. (2003, p22)

What Rubin suggests is that, while Spinoza's theory of imagination does indeed offer a rich and evocative account of everyday human thought and its productiveness, to read Spinoza's epistemology as primarily concerned with this kind of thinking is to lose sight of the significance for the project of the Ethics of how different ways of knowing contribute to achieving a state of freedom and *beatitudo*. In other words, too concentrated a focus on imagination takes us away from Spinoza's central philosophical concerns. LeBuffe (2010) exhibits similar concerns about a focus on imagination losing sight of Spinoza's own aims, when he proposes that Spinoza should be read as promoting an intellectualism in which knowledge is intrinsically valuable and the endeavour to improve one's state of knowledge is the ethical endeavour *par excellence*. As part of this intellectualism, and although Spinoza's epistemology acknowledges imaginative

knowledge and its usefulness, LeBuffe argues that the central thesis of the *Ethics* is that the aim and purpose of improving our knowledge is to achieve an enhanced self-knowledge and a knowledge of God that is intrinsically inaccessible to imagination. As Spinoza's mature theory of knowledge is set out in the *Ethics*, LeBuffe contends that it must be read as an integral part of that specifically ethical project: knowledge is interesting insofar as it is a route to the good, in the form of *beatitudo*. Since imagination alone does not provide the right kind of basis for recognising the good, LeBuffe argues that an undue emphasis on imagination risks losing sight of the very reason for Spinoza's interest in knowledge.

It is, of course, true to say that imagination is positioned in Spinoza's philosophy as knowledge that is necessarily subject to privation and the only source of error in knowing; this needs to be addressed and accounted for in any interpretation that seeks to do justice to Spinoza's theory of knowledge. But some of these challenges overstate their case, in that, typically, commentators who highlight the importance of imagination in Spinoza's writings do not go so far as to suggest that imagination is all there is to Spinoza's epistemology. When Balibar and Negri emphasise the role of imagination, for example, this is in the context of a specific focus on Spinoza's political writings; it is not intended to encompass the full scope of Spinoza's theory of knowledge. James explicitly situates an appreciation of the importance of imagination within an interpretation of Spinoza's project as exploring how best human beings may enhance their powers of philosophical reasoning. And Gatens and Lloyd highlight the introduction in the *Ethics* of an ontological dimension to Spinoza's epistemology, which makes clear that imagination must be understood as one aspect of a holistic philosophy, not only of knowledge but of the whole of nature. An exegetical focus on imagination, in other words, does not amount to a reduction of Spinoza's epistemology to that single aspect of knowledge, or even a suggestion that imagination is the most important element in Spinoza's epistemology. Further, it is far from the case that interpretations which focus on imagination neglect Spinoza's ethical concerns: on the contrary, they seek precisely to show how this kind of knowledge contributes to achieving freedom

from human bondage. In other words, interpretations which make imagination their primary focus do so in order to demonstrate that imagination is not a separate domain of thought but is integrated into the project of avoiding servitude. While Curley (1996) expresses concerns about whether Spinoza's philosophy has the resources to generate genuine normative claims, Gatens and Lloyd draw attention to how a Spinozistic understanding of knowledge as overwhelmingly imaginative can shed light on the epistemological status of existing norms.

Both the attraction and the pitfalls of putting imagination at the centre of Spinoza's theory of knowledge become even more apparent when one focuses on what it would take to acquire knowledge in the form of adequate ideas. Wilson (1996) argues that Spinoza faces a difficulty in that his theory of knowledge appears to set adequate knowledge as a goal while failing to provide an account of how it is possible for human beings to acquire adequate ideas beyond those which they have in common with all bodies; while Della Rocca (1996) interprets Spinoza as holding that it is impossible for the human mind to have adequate ideas. In the face of these significant problems for making sense of Spinoza's epistemology, I suggest that a different approach is required. Specifically, rethinking the relation between the kinds of knowledge outlined at *E2p40s2*, on the one hand, and the identification of ideas as adequate or inadequate, on the other, seems to offer potential for a more fruitful appreciation of Spinoza's approach to theorising knowledge.

I argue in this chapter for a reading of the *Ethics* which views Spinoza's epistemology through the lens of expression and effect discussed in Chapter 2. The different kinds of knowledge may then be parsed as ways of exposing the complexity of what human beings do in the activity of knowing. The ideas formed in human thought are understood as effects distinctive of human beings *qua* modes, and Spinoza's concepts of imagination, reason and *scientia intuitiva* are synthesised into an analysis of what is involved in the production of such effects. I propose that the significant classification of ideas for Spinoza's epistemology is that between adequate and inadequate ideas, and suggest that interpretive conflicts over the relative contributions of imagination and reason derive from

an uncontextualised focus on *E2p40s2*, resulting in a *de facto* postulation of norms of thinking or even (explicitly or implicitly) faculties of mind. In the scholium, Spinoza's brief exposition of differences among ideas formed by minds takes on a life of its own: it suggests to his philosophical readers that he is making recommendations as to epistemic goals, justificatory criteria or methodological strategies for evaluating knowledge claims. I shall propose reading Part 2 of the *Ethics* quite differently: rather than focusing on knowledge claims, Spinoza's epistemology aims at a better understanding of the activity of knowing.

2. The Evolution of Spinoza's Theorising of Knowledge

In both Part 2 of the *Ethics* and the earlier *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* Spinoza sets out schematic accounts of different kinds of knowledge. It can be tempting to read these in parallel, as variations on essentially the same theory of knowledge: an exercise in restricting the scope of what can properly count as knowledge by drawing attention to the potential for 'knowing falsely' inherent in particular kinds of enquiry. In this case, the analysis in both works would be understood to underpin the thesis that, for Spinoza, true knowledge is delivered only through deduction from first principles and not from unreliable experience. In contesting this interpretation, I draw a contrast between the classifications of knowledge in the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* and the *Ethics*, and argue that there is a significant shift between the two works: Spinoza moves away from the attempt to identify the best kind of knowledge and adopts a new approach through which he seeks to understand how the mind comes to have the knowledge it does, drawing the reader's attention to knowledge as a complex, potentially fragile feature of human life. As such, the tripartite division of knowledge which is a central theme in the *Treatise* functions in *E2p40s2* as a clarificatory tool for Spinoza's readers, linking the innovative approach to epistemology of the *Ethics* to more familiar philosophical frameworks.

In §19 of the *Treatise*, all ways of knowing (*modos percipiendi*) are said to fall into one of four kinds. Knowledge "arising from hearsay or from some sign"

corresponds roughly to all knowledge that comes from perception, including knowledge of items with a human origin, such as testimony or signs. Knowledge from *experientia vaga*, “random experience”, is knowledge which comprises more complex ideas derived from informal comparisons between things or generalisations about the properties of things and makes up “nearly all the practical knowledge of life” (§20). Knowledge “when the essence of one thing is inferred from another, but not adequately” seems intended to capture all second order knowledge, or knowledge through inference, including scientific knowledge – Spinoza gives the example of being able to infer that the sun is much larger than it appears through knowledge of the nature of vision and the distance of the sun from the earth (§21) – and is also said to be the basis of our everyday understanding of the relation of mind to body. In contrast to this, Spinoza illustrates knowledge “when a thing is perceived solely through its essence or through knowledge of its proximate cause” (§19) with the example that “from knowing the essence of the mind, I know that it is united to the body” (§21).

Spinoza confirms that his aim in the *Treatise* is to identify the best mode of perception (§18) and that “The fourth mode alone apprehends the adequate essence of a thing without danger of error” (§29). Indeed, only this knowledge of a proximate cause is designated as *cognitio*, indicating that the *Treatise* represents a quasi-Cartesian analytical project, refining the application of the term ‘knowledge’ so as to restrict it to items known to be true. However, Spinoza points out that “the things I have so far been able to know by this kind of knowledge have been very few” (§22), already indicating a concern about the paradoxical epistemic impoverishment that results either when knowledge is restricted to correct definitions and what can be deduced from them or when external sources are ruled out as sources of knowledge.

In the later work of the *Ethics*, Spinoza again sets out a structured classification of knowledge (*E2p40s2*). Reports, signs and the senses yield “knowledge of the first kind, opinion or imagination”. “[C]ommon notions [*notiones communes*] and adequate ideas of the properties of things” constitute “reason and the second kind of knowledge”. The third category, *scientia intuitiva*,

“proceeds from an adequate idea of certain attributes of God to the adequate knowledge of the essence of things”. Both the second and the third kinds of knowledge consist in adequate ideas and are necessarily true, while “to knowledge of the first kind pertain all those ideas which are inadequate and confused” (E2p4, p41d).

It is tempting to read this sketch in the *Ethics* in tandem with that in the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*: the later work as essentially following the project of the earlier. Then, Spinoza would be seen as simply formalising a distinction between two dimensions of the fourth category proposed in the *Treatise*: knowing things through their proximate causes comes to be designated as ‘reason’ and knowing something solely through its essence as *scientia intuitiva*. Such an interpretation, seeking to maintain a continuity between the two works, would suggest that in the *Ethics* Spinoza retains the strong distinction discernible in the *Treatise* between actual knowledge and mere modes of perception. The differentiation between imagination on the one hand, and reason and *scientia intuitiva* on the other, would then be seen as setting aside questions of mere perception to restrict knowledge proper to adequate ideas conceptually distinguished by being inferred from either the adequate idea of God or ‘common notions’. This picture would reinforce the thought that Spinoza’s project is the conventional philosophical one of drawing a line between ‘knowledge of the first kind’, or everyday knowledge, and knowledge proper – implicitly, philosophical knowledge).

The problem with such a reading is that, surface similarities notwithstanding, there is no straightforward read-across from the schema of the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* to that of the *Ethics*. It seems clear enough that the first and second kinds of knowledge from the *Treatise* are subsumed under ‘opinion or imagination’. This category of knowledge explicitly includes all ordinary universals – “Man, Horse, Dog and the like” (E2p40s1) – of which, Spinoza says, the ‘definition’ (clearly not a definition in the formal sense) may vary from person to person. It also includes “the terms called Transcendental...like Being, Thing and Something” (E2p40s1), which Spinoza sees as being impossible to conceive clearly and distinctly. But it looks as though

'opinion or imagination' will also turn out to include at least some of the third kind of knowledge from the *Treatise*, "when the essence of one thing is inferred from another, but not adequately", since such inadequate inferences appear to be excluded from either the second or third kinds of knowledge in the *Ethics* by the stipulation that these kinds of knowledge comprise only adequate ideas. Further, it seems as though the second kind of knowledge – named as reason, consisting in "common notions and adequate ideas of the properties of things" (E2p40s2), and necessarily true (E2p41) – must somehow fill the epistemic gap between the deliverances of perception, experience and empirical investigation and the knowledge of the essences of things.

I offer an alternative reading, drawing on Curley's demonstration that experience is always present as an ingredient of knowledge in Spinoza's theory and combining this with the philosophy of mind that is the central concern of Part 2 of the *Ethics*. I suggest that Spinoza's differentiation between the three kinds of knowledge is purely a conceptual – indeed, an imaginative – one: actual knowledge claims should be understood to involve both imagination and reason, together with an ineliminable element of *scientia intuitiva*. Spinoza's purpose in describing knowledge through these distinctions is not to elaborate a tiered epistemology with an implicit prescription for how to progress and perfect knowledge, but to draw out the implications of his philosophy of mind for human beings' capacity for knowing.

The *Ethics* provides substantial textual justification for interpreting Spinoza's mature theory as one that attributes the status of knowledge proper to the imperfect deliverances of experience. Where the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* restricts *cognitio* to the fourth category of knowledge, the first three kinds of knowledge being *modos percipiendi*, the *Ethics* gives *cognitio* broader scope. Imagination is *cognitionem primi generis, opinionem, vel imaginationem*, while *rationem*, reason, is *secundi generis cognitionem*. I suggest that this change in the use of language between the two works should alert us to a fundamental shift in Spinoza's conceptualisation of knowledge. I argue that, unlike the *Treatise's* quasi-Cartesian project of valuing and pursuing knowledge that is clear and distinct, the treatment in the *Ethics* aims at a descriptive account

of knowing, taking as its theme what is involved in human beings making the knowledge claims they do. Reading Spinoza's later theory in this way, I believe, has a number of advantages. First, it recognises the place of the exposition of knowledge at *E2p40s2* within the overall project of the *Ethics*, and specifically within the subject matter of Part 2, *On the Nature and Origin of the Mind*. Second, it avoids aligning with any strand of interpretation which prioritises one kind of knowledge above others in Spinoza's epistemology, as it entails that actual, existent knowledge claims necessarily involve and require all three kinds of knowledge. Finally, in focusing on the phenomenon of knowing, rather than on items of knowledge, as the subject-matter of Spinoza's theory, it makes much clearer the continuity between the *Ethics* and Spinoza's political works.

3. Mind and Knowing

The novelty of Spinoza's philosophy of mind should be apparent from the account of mind and affect in section 3 of Chapter 3. First, since a mind is nothing other than the ideas that compose it, there is no ground for positing specific faculties of mind, such as intellect, will or perception, unless the ideas themselves can be shown to constitute such a faculty. Confusingly, Spinoza does make frequent references to intellect, in which he appears to suggest that it has a distinctive epistemic role: for example, in *E2p18s*, where the 'order of the intellect' is contrasted with the 'order of affections of the human body'. However, he qualifies his own use of intellect, as designating modifications of the divine intellect (*E1pp30-31*), in which respect the thought of all existent modes stands on the same footing. Further, he explicitly rejects the reification of faculties of mind: "the intellect and the will stand in the same relation to this or that idea, or this or that volition, as 'rapidity' to this or that stone, or as 'man' to Peter and Paul" (*E2p48*). In other words, talk of faculties of mind is merely an instance either of predication or of deploying 'ordinary universals': inadequate ideas by which we seek to explain our own experiences of thinking. Second, as the mind knows only through modifications of the body, epistemological questions setting knowledge through experience against knowledge proper miss their mark. The task of epistemology is not to delineate what qualifies as true knowledge but to explicate the phenomenon of human knowing, its limits, its potential, and how it

works. The full force of *E2a3*, “Man thinks”, is that understanding knowledge first requires conceptualising knowing as an activity of some existent mode, involving both body and mind.

Similarly, on the question of how commentators have treated Spinoza’s categorisation of kinds of knowledge, I suggest that it is best read as primarily as an aid to understanding the ramifications of the philosophy of mind developed throughout Part 2 of the *Ethics*, helping the reader to orientate Spinoza’s novel account of mind and its operations by reference to more familiar philosophical terms or categories¹. It then becomes apparent that Spinoza’s concern here is to give an account of how human minds come to think the things that they do, through being constituted as they are, rather than to define and offer criteria for identification of a category of thinking or ideas which counts as knowledge. Knowing comes into view as an activity of human beings *qua* existent modes, grounded in the actions and effects of which human beings are capable.

As argued in Chapter 3, a human mind is, for Spinoza, nothing but the idea of an existent mode that has a human body: it is the idea of that body, *qua* singular thing and also in all its complexity (*E2pp11-13*). As such, a human mind is a complex aggregation of ideas corresponding to the composition of a human body. In constituting the mind, those ideas are adequate: they are simply the counterpart in thought of certain modes of extension (*E2p9*, p15). Despite the fact that these ideas are adequate in the composition of the mind, however, they are not available to it: the mind knows itself and the body which is its object only through the ideas it forms of affections of the body, that is to say, inadequately (*E2p27-29*). Similarly, when the mind forms ideas of things which affect its body, these ideas are adequate insofar as they are existent ideas, that is, insofar as they have God for their cause (*E2p9*): they are inadequate only insofar as they are perceptions of the human mind, that is, in that they are not adequate ideas of what the mind takes to be their objects. Thus the mind is constituted by ideas that are all adequate in themselves, that is, in their existence in mind; but its perception or knowledge of its ideas is largely inadequate. Ontologically, ideas

¹ Concepts of imagination, reason and intuition were all common currency in Cartesian philosophy in Spinoza’s time.

are necessarily adequate, but this in itself tells us nothing about the mind's epistemic capacities or achievements. The binary classification of ideas as adequate or inadequate is at the core of Spinoza's epistemology, but understanding their contribution to our making particular knowledge claims requires a more thorough engagement with Spinoza's philosophy of mind.

The expression of substance in the attribute of thought is thinking; as such, the minds of existent modes express substance by forming ideas (*E2d3*), and in doing so, they act (*E2d3exp*). Spinoza describes these ideas as concepts, rather than perceptions, to underscore the point that the mind is active in bringing them into being. However, minds do not form ideas in isolation from body: the scope of a mind's ability to form ideas is determined by the range of dispositions of the body which is its object, and thus the range of perceptions available to the mind (*E2p14*). Thus when Spinoza considers knowledge, he considers the embodied knowing of human beings, not the knowledge of a Cartesian intellect which operates on the body. Elucidating and improving knowledge first requires an appreciation that knowing is necessarily mediated through both body and mind.

Nonetheless, Spinoza acknowledges a contrast between the associations of ideas in the process of imagining, in which the mind perceives and forms inadequate ideas "according to the order and connection of the affections of the human body" (*E2p18s*), with thinking according to "the order of the intellect, by which the mind perceives things through their first causes, and which is the same in all men" (*E2p18s*). The contrast maps a qualitative epistemological distinction onto the metaphysical account of the different ways that the mind is taken to form ideas: whenever (*quoties*) the mind is determined externally, its ideas are "mutilated and confused", whereas whenever it is determined from within, it "regards things clearly and distinctly" (*E2p29s*). This tells us that Spinoza does not equate embodied knowing with inadequate ideas alone, but as yet there is no account of how the mind might become aware of or make use of the adequate ideas that constitute its existence, much less whether it might form adequate ideas of its own or achieve adequate understanding of its inadequate ideas. A potential answer to this question begins to take shape at *E2p37*.

Referring back to the brief thesis on bodies following *E2p13*, Spinoza uses the principle that “all bodies agree in certain things” (*E2p13s[a2’L2]*) as the springboard for an argument to the mind’s having adequate ideas. Since individual minds are ideas of particular bodies, then the ideas of those things that are common to all bodies will be common to all minds: the ‘common notions’ to be cited as the foundation of all reasoning at *E2p40s*. Spinoza argues that such common notions can only be *conceived* adequately and, as such, must be *perceived* adequately, or clearly and distinctly, by all minds.

In the next section, I focus on Spinoza’s account of common notions, specifically on what it means to claim them as the foundation of all reasoning. I use this discussion as the basis for an interpretation of Spinoza’s epistemology in which his ‘three kinds of knowledge’ must operate both independently and interdependently. Of course there are real differences among different kinds of knowledge, in that they exemplify different epistemic capabilities. However, the endeavour to know and to know better does not involve moving from one kind of knowing to another; rather, it requires understanding the epistemic limitations and potential of all our ideas. The brief sketch in *E2p40s2* can then be appreciated as drawing the reader’s attention to relevant features of different ideas formed by the mind, rather than as a normatively-loaded classification of knowledge as such. This avoids the pitfall of overemphasising one kind of knowledge at the expense of losing the distinctive contribution of the other. It also retains the interpretive focus firmly in the domain of how minds come by the knowledge they have, rather than being diverted into questions of what kind of knowledge is best. A reading of Spinoza’s epistemology in which *scientia intuitiva*, reason and imagination always go together can, I suggest, do justice to all three kinds of knowledge and their respective contributions to the ideas which comprise our knowledge claims.

4. Reason and the Common Notions

The common notions have provoked considerable interpretive controversy² and I do not seek to make a detailed exploration of that debate here. I do, however,

² See e.g. Toth (2017); Schliesser (2011); Buyse (2008); Miller (2003); Klever (1986)

wish to draw attention to some aspects of the common notions that raise interesting questions as to their implications for human knowledge and knowledge claims. First, the universality of the common notions makes it reasonable to ask just what kind of role they are supposed to play in knowing. Spinoza's appeal to 'the order of the intellect' and to their being 'the foundation of all our reasoning' has prompted many commentators to propose that common notions are intended to account for the presumptively superior epistemic capacities of human beings. Yet the common notions are not only common to all minds in the metaphysical sense of constituting those minds; according to Spinoza's account, they are also ideas which can only be perceived and conceived adequately, by any mind whatsoever (*E2p39*). This has led some commentators to question whether the common notions are a plausible candidate for being the foundation of all our reasoning. For example, Huenemann (2008) objects that if the common notions are common to all minds and as such not unique to minds capable of reflective or philosophical thinking, then it seems that they cannot explain what is distinctive about reasoning. Similarly, Garrett (2008) points out that common notions must also be constitutive of the ideas of inanimate objects, including body parts and artefacts.

One of the most natural ways to think of the common notions is as the analogue in Spinoza's philosophy of Descartes' theory of innate ideas. For example, Wilson (1996) argues that the common notions form part of a strategy to establish that the human mind has certain adequate ideas independently of experience, simply in consequence of its being the idea of the body. Under the parallelism thesis the human mind, *qua* idea of the human body, has innate knowledge in the form of adequate ideas of universal and non-contingent features of the physical world. Since "whatever ideas follow in the mind from ideas that are adequate in the mind are also adequate" (*E2p40*), having any adequate ideas at all provides a foundational basis for extending one's repertoire of adequate knowledge. Wilson therefore reads Spinoza as positing a theory of knowledge in which the human mind has the potential to build up its stock of adequate ideas by working outwards from the body of which it is the idea: from its adequate ideas of "whatever is wholly contained in the body" (*p112*), it can go

on to form adequate ideas of the basic features of material nature that characterise any body at all; and finally, it can attain adequate ideas of the essences of other particular things.

Wilson's understanding of common notions as innate in the sense of being constitutive of a mind which is the idea of some body seems quite right; but as an epistemological thesis it remains opaque in the absence of a substantive account of the common notions: just what are the ideas of what is 'wholly contained in the body', what kind of knowledge of them is the mind supposed to have, and how is it that so much of our knowledge fails to be adequate, if one set of adequate ideas provides the basis for successive adequate ideas which 'follow' from them? Wilson characterises this difficulty as Spinoza falling foul of a general objection to substantive innatism: that there is a lack of plausibility in the thought that every human being can claim the direct and comprehensive insight into material nature suggested by such a thesis, even implicitly. In other words, Spinoza's metaphysics of mind lacks the resources to generate a credible epistemology.

I wish to challenge this interpretation and propose a way of thinking about the common notions which embraces the stipulation that they are present in all minds while accounting for the epistemic repertoire of human beings. My challenge to the picture of Spinoza as holding a theory of innate knowledge is prompted by the following considerations. First, although it is clear enough that the common notions are innate ideas, in the sense of being ideas that are constitutive of the mind, it is not obvious that they involve or amount to specific claims about the physical world. Although Spinoza uses Cartesian terminology in saying that the common notions are known clearly and distinctly, Spinoza's philosophy contains no substantive proposal to the effect that the common notions amount to knowledge of specific physical theories or laws. Second, it is notable in this context that, although the *Ethics* is set out in geometric format, Spinoza diverges from geometric method in not specifying his common notions. The point of 'common notions' is indeed that they are ideas in need of no demonstration but, where Euclid's common notions are specified as necessary non-geometric axioms, Spinoza leaves the content of his common notions

unarticulated. Finally, in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* Spinoza writes, “in examining natural things we strive, before all else, to investigate the things which are most universal and common to the whole of nature – viz. motion and rest, and their laws and rules” (*TTP*7[27]). But if the laws of nature were in fact perceived clearly and distinctly by all there would be no need to investigate them. These considerations would seem to mandate a reconsideration of what Spinoza intends by the ‘common notions’, in an effort to respect both their ubiquity and variations in epistemic repertoire among existent modes.

I suggest that the most fruitful way to treat Spinoza’s common notions is as a postulation of the kind of ideas that are necessary in order for any mind to be the idea of a body, rather than as a substantive claim about the specific content of a subset of the ideas constituting the mind. In other words, the most compelling candidates for common notions are whatever *simple* ideas have the simplest bodies as their object: those ideas are therefore necessarily constitutive of any mind, corresponding to whatever is in fact the most basic expression of the attribute of extension. This does not commit Spinoza to any given theory of bodies – indeed, it leaves open the question of whether the common notions are meant to be adequate ideas of the physicality of individual modes (which would tally with their being “common to all, and equally in the part or in the whole”, as specified at *E2p38*), or of relational properties (which could be suggested by the stipulation at *E2p29c* that when the mind is “disposed internally, in this or another way, then it regards things clearly and distinctly”). Rather, it appeals to Lemma 2 of the physical interlude at *E2p13*, “All bodies agree in certain things”, as providing the basis for common notions as an epistemological resource. Such agreement among bodies is required in order for there to be interfaces and interactions among modes; the equivalent agreement among minds is the basis for modes extending their knowledge of each other. This reading removes the difficulty of specifying suitable candidates for Spinoza’s common notions, by removing understanding of the common notions from the domain of propositional knowledge. It has the advantage of conforming with the metaphysical thesis that the mind is the idea of the body; and it respects the silence in the text of the *Ethics* on the content of common notions. As such, it

preserves Wilson's insight that common notions are ideas that are constitutive of all minds, while avoiding her objections to innatism by avoiding any suggestion that the common notions are available to any minds in reflective thought.

This resolution of the metaphysical position of the common notions by a parsimonious approach to their epistemological status, however, leaves us with the question of how to make sense of Spinoza's claims about them: first, that they are perceived clearly and distinctly by all; and second, that they are the foundations of our (human) reasoning. This poses a challenge for my reading, in that I have chosen to take the absence of a specification of the common notions in Spinoza's text at face value: that is, as indicating that Spinoza does not state them just because they cannot be specified in propositional terms.

There is undeniably a certain tension in the thought that one cannot specify the very ideas that can only be conceived adequately and are known clearly and distinctly by all. But the absence of propositional content seems entirely appropriate, indeed unavoidable, if one considers the ubiquity of the common notions: for 'all' in this context certainly means 'all entities', rather than 'all human beings'. If all minds have – are partially constituted by – the common notions, as *E2p38c* explicitly states, then it seems that the claim that they are perceived clearly and distinctly by all must also apply to all individuals, sentient or otherwise, given that there are no distinct faculties to differentiate those minds which perceive the common notions from those which do not. Then, the sense in which common notions are known adequately, or clearly and distinctly, does not require any commitment to their being items of propositional knowledge that would require a capacity for articulation, or even to their being *de facto* conceptualised in virtue of their logical necessity. Rather, they are known adequately in that they are ideas which are, in Spinoza's parlance, "involved in" – that is, a fact of – the existence of any mode and are 'known' by all minds in the sense of being expressed in modes' existence in capacities to, for example, move around in space. My interpretation has textual support from *E2p40s2*, where ideas formed as a result of reading or hearing words are specified as examples of imagination, and from Spinoza's injunction to his readers to distinguish between ideas, images and words:

...an idea, since it is a mode of thinking, consists neither in the image of anything, nor in words. For the essence of words and of images is constituted only by corporeal motions, which do not at all involve the concept of thought. (E2p49s)

Both of these scholia support the thought that common notions are pre-propositional: the first suggests that any expression of knowledge in propositional terms acquires inadequate content through being associated with signs and recollection; the latter underlines the point that an idea *simpliciter* is a mode of thought alone, and as such that its philosophical significance is existential rather than epistemological.

My minimalist, non-propositional view of the common notions is also consistent with Spinoza's deployment of the Cartesian terminology of clarity and distinctness. Descartes' use of clear and distinct perception as an epistemic criterion in the *Meditations on First Philosophy* does not rest on an idea's being available in propositional form. Indeed, the *cogito* is controversial as an item of propositional knowledge, and has been alternatively glossed as both non-inferential and performative (Hintikka, 1962); while there is interpretive debate about whether clear and distinct perception is intended to mark out ideas by their metaphysical or their psychological status (e.g. Kenny, 1968; Gewirth, 1970). I suggest that Spinoza's deployment in the *Ethics* of clarity and distinctness as epistemic criteria follows Descartes' foundational use, and serves to focus attention on the fundamentality of whatever ideas are capable of being clearly and distinctly perceived, rather than on their status as knowledge claims.

My thesis that Spinoza's common notions are to be understood as non-propositional, with no theoretical content beyond the principles articulated in the physical interlude at E2p13, has the advantage of avoiding the interpretive difficulties which arise if the common notions are taken to represent specific theses about the physical world. It recognises that Spinoza's ontology of mind is innatist to the extent that the mind is constituted by ideas, but the epistemic status of the ideas involved – as ideas that are facts of existence, rather than ideas that are entertained by minds, or present to minds in reflection – acquits Spinoza of making implausible attributions of knowledge or insight to any mind,

human or non-human. An idea's comprising part of the constitution of our mind is not sufficient for us to claim it as reflective knowledge. Curley's concern that various inadequate theories of the laws of motion have been expounded during the course of human history is thus neither here nor there, since such theories are not common notions but imaginative constructs seeking to explain observed phenomena, with greater or lesser degrees of success. And since the common notions are expressed in existence, rather than entertained as propositions, there is no problem with holding that they must be in the 'minds', or the adequate ideas, of carrots, toasters, pancreases or any of the variety of individuated objects which appear in the secondary literature to illustrate the problematic of the common notions.

This brings us to the more important question of whether my interpretation of the common notions as non-propositional can give a more plausible account of how they can serve as "the foundations of our reasoning", as Spinoza claims at *E2p40s1*. Is it possible to dispel the concerns of Huenemann, Garrett and others, which I raised at the beginning of this section, as to whether ideas common to all can coherently be understood as underpinning human beings' capacities for reasoning? Spinoza's solution to this problem in the *Ethics* appears to rely on *E2p39* and to be essentially an argument from complexity (Nadler, 2013). A mind has greater potential access to adequate ideas, the greater the extent of commonality between its body and the external bodies by which it may be affected (*E2p39c*): thus its capacity for both imagination and adequate knowledge is directly related to the body's physical complexity and repertoire of potential encounters. This reading thus credits Spinoza with the theoretical resources to distinguish in principle between the epistemic capabilities of different embodied entities: human beings' capacity for gaining adequate (and indeed inadequate) ideas will reflect the relative complexity of the composition of their bodies and the corresponding potential for a range of encounters with other bodies; simpler entities will have more limited epistemic repertoires, and more complex entities, greater ones. The fact that all modes stand in the same metaphysical relation to the common notions tells us nothing about what any particular existent mode can make of that relation, because

existent modes extend their epistemic repertoires through their capacity for encounters, not through a hypothesised internal engine of reason.

5. Spinoza's Epistemology of Hybrid Knowing

In the previous section, I argued that common notions can coherently be understood as common to all entities if we consider them as intrinsically non-propositional, that is, as not capable of articulation in themselves; and I indicated that Spinoza's solution to the question of varying epistemic capacities among entities lies in his appeal to their bodily differentiation. Significantly, this refocuses Spinoza's theory of knowledge, away from the mind considered in isolation and toward a commitment to the embodied knowledge of existent modes. The common notions are adequate ideas of what is common to all *bodies*; thus, the common notions constitute adequate embodied knowledge. Further, extending one's adequate knowledge requires an existent mode to engage with (be affected by) other existent modes: the epistemic potential offered by having a relatively complex body is not realised unless and until that body encounters others. As existent modes, however, our efforts to extend our knowledge are also intrinsically fallible and fragile: the knowledge we derive from encounters with other bodies is *inadequate*, the adequate content of the common notions notwithstanding. The essential embodiment of the knowledge project means that inadequate knowledge and adequate knowledge go hand in hand: improving our state of knowledge requires engagement with, not denial of or distance from, our capacity and tendency to form inadequate ideas. Privation of knowledge associated with inadequate ideas is unavoidable but not absolute: the privation in an inadequate idea may be revealed through an encounter of which the mind forms a contrary idea (E2p17). Further, while some privations are harmful, others may be productive and indeed required for a mode's persistence in being: as I argued in Chapter 2, the transformative effects which underpin the development of living things rely on inadequate ideas, rather than adequate ones.

The sense in which the common notions can be the foundation of our reasoning, then, is not their special epistemic status; rather, they make it the case

that we can in fact extend our knowledge. First, *qua* ideas of genuine universal commonalities, common notions guarantee that all ideas are commensurate to some extent and so underpin our ability to relate and compare the different encounters that we undergo. Second, *qua* hypothesis of existent commonality, the common notions offer an instance of essential connection and coherence in nature (*natura naturata*), which in turn suggests that there are further genuine commonalities to be discovered among our manifold encounters, through investigation and interrogation. Spinoza's conception of reason, therefore, is as an activity of mind, directed at understanding systematicity in the expression of substance. This supports my contention that the distinction among different kinds of knowledge at *E2p40s2* is not quite what it appears: it cannot be intended as endorsing a conventional distinction between separate kinds of knowledge, marked out by differing contents or standards of rigour. Rather, it should be read as identifying a difference in kind among the multiplicity of ideas that arise in our encounters. Our complex ideas of our encounters with others, like the mind's complex idea of its own body, will contain both adequate and inadequate ideas. As such, in our knowledge endeavours and claims, reason, imagination and indeed *scientia intuitiva* must go hand in hand: the ideas we use to share and extend our knowledge will be hybrids of adequate and inadequate content.

The suggestion that knowing necessarily involves a hybrid of adequate and inadequate ideas might be taken in one of two ways. First, it could amount to the weak claim that the content of actual everyday knowledge claims necessarily involves both imagination and reason, but that identifying the adequate content and applying the right methods of thinking make it possible for the discerning knower to refine her knowledge claims and distil their adequate content, with the implication that such an exercise would be both successful and epistemically productive. Alternatively, it could express a stronger claim, that all the ideas accessible to our thought processes are *inextricably* hybrids of adequate and inadequate content, such that all knowledge and all thinking must be understood as having an inadequate and thus imaginative dimension. This claim would entail that, while it is possible (and potentially even fruitful) to identify different kinds

of content in knowledge claims, seeking to know through reason will be a relative and necessarily fallible matter. Here I defend the stronger claim as the more consistent with both the metaphysics of mind in Part 2 and the recommendation of reason as the route to human freedom in Part 5 of the *Ethics*. I seek to show that, on Spinoza's account, there are no imaginations without reason, and no reasoning without imagination, and that *scientia intuitiva* is present in all of our thinking.

To begin it is instructive to look again at the scholia to *E2p40*, and especially *E2p40s1*. Spinoza sets out the purpose of this scholium at the start: having explained common notions, to explain how our minds acquire other purportedly unifying concepts. The explanatory focus, then, is the kind of knowledge claims which involve categorial terms – terms which bring different objects under a single description – and the goal is to determine which are more and which less useful (*Ex iis namque constaret, quatenam notiones prae reliquis utiliores, quatenam vero vix ullius usus essent...*). Spinoza goes on to say that such categorial terms are formed by multiple bodily affections giving rise to multiple images which “surpass the power of imagining” so that the mind “imagines distinctly only what they all agree in, insofar as they affect the body. *For the body has been affected most forcefully by what is common.*” (*E2p40s1*, my emphasis). Hence ‘universal’ ideas such as man, horse, or dog do track some genuine commonality among the things to which they are applied, even though the ideas themselves are inadequate and express that commonality only confusedly. Indeed, the reason we use universal terms at all is precisely that we have been affected in the same way by something about the individual modes to which we apply those terms: “the mind can imagine neither slight differences of the singular [men] (such as the colour and size of each one, etc.) nor their determinate number, and imagines distinctly only what they all agree in, insofar as they affect the body” (*E2p40s*). Thus even the more abstract ‘transcendental’ terms such as “Being, Thing and Something” appeal to confused perceptions of something that is genuinely common in how things affect us. Thus imagination and reason, affections and commonalities, can be seen as combined in these terms.

The identification of three kinds of knowledge in *E2p40s2* follows from this account of universal and transcendental terms being formed on the basis of perceptions of commonalities. This makes for a tripartite classification of knowledge which is significantly different from that in the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* described in section 2 of this chapter. Both reason, or commonality, and imagination, or our imperfect apprehension of such commonality, are held to be *cognitio*. The third kind of knowledge is separately identified as *scientia intuitiva*: knowledge that “proceeds from an adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes of God to the adequate knowledge of the essence of things” (*E2p40s2*). Spinoza illustrates the different kinds of knowledge with an example:

Three numbers are given for finding a fourth, which shall be to the third as the second is to the first. Tradesmen without hesitation multiply the second by the third, and divide the product by the first; either because they have not forgotten the rule which they received from a master without any proof, or because they have often made trial of it with simple numbers, or by virtue of the proof of the nineteenth proposition of the seventh book of Euclid, namely, in virtue of the general property of proportionals.

But with very simple numbers there is no need of this. For instance, one, two, three, being given, everyone can see that the fourth proportional is six; and this is much clearer, because we infer the fourth number from an intuitive grasping of the ratio, which the first bears to the second. (*E2p40s2*).

The recollection and application of a rule and the extension of a principle successful in simple cases to more complex cases are given as instances of imagination; reason is represented by knowledge of the Euclidean proof of proportionals; while intuition is given as a (non-mysterious) insight into the way that things are. Spinoza brings the first three methods together as possible ways in which ‘tradesmen’ may proceed in resolving the problem, highlighting the unique and unrestricted nature of intuitive knowledge. Unlike the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, which sets up a hierarchy in which recollection, heuristics and application of a rule represent a qualitative ascent in ways of

knowing, it appears that the *Ethics* holds these methods to be on the same footing, as knowledge characterised by inferential process rather than by insight. I suggest that this should prompt us to read Spinoza as understanding both reasoning and imagining as essential ways of building on the insights of *scientia intuitiva* in the activity of knowledge *formation*, or knowing.

We are now in a position to clarify the force of the shift in Spinoza's epistemology highlighted earlier, from the normative model of the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* to the interrogative project of the *Ethics*. The *Treatise* is premised on the existence of intellect as a faculty of mind which can be exercised and honed independently in a project of perfecting one's knowledge. By contrast, in the *Ethics* Spinoza takes mind to be merely a collection of ideas, all adequate in themselves but some only inadequately perceived by the mind. The consequence of this move is that the mind does not have 'faculties', and therefore does not have a repertoire of different, implicitly separable, ways of thinking. Our ideas of ourselves, and of finite things in general, are complex ideas, comprising both adequate and inadequate content. Our knowing is thus *hybrid* knowing: the fact that it is largely imaginative neither deprives it of adequate content nor marks it as lacking reason. In the *Ethics*, we no longer have the option of moving away from the domain of imagination and towards that of reason; rather, we extend and improve our hybrid knowing, seeking to identify the privations in its inadequate content and to perceive the adequate knowledge available to us in virtue of the commonalities between ourselves and other things.

Accepting that all the ideas we acquire as embodied knowers from our encounters with other bodies involve both adequate and inadequate content, however, establishes only the weak claim of hybrid knowing, that our everyday knowledge necessarily involves both imagination and reason. To establish the stronger claim, that our knowing is *inextricably* hybrid, requires showing that the adequate ideas of reason and the inadequate ideas of imagination cannot be separated from each other: that the enterprise of knowing better cannot be one of distilling hybrid ideas into adequate ones.

In section 4 of this chapter I argued that we can make sense of the ideas of inanimate objects having common notions without attributing to them the capacity for thought if we accept that the common notions comprise non-propositional knowledge; and in this section I have argued that Spinoza shows in the *Ethics* that both reason and imagination are involved in knowledge formation. But, as the example of the merchants in *E2p40s2* shows, non-propositional knowledge cannot be used separately from propositional knowledge: the common notions which are present as adequate ideas in us and which are the foundation of our reasoning cannot be taken further in developing our knowledge without first articulating them in words or signs. Thus our reasoning must already deploy ideas of imagination, in both expression and content. Those ideas and associations of imagination are determined by the bodies that we have and their capacities for being affected by other bodies. So our reasoning not only makes use of our imaginations, it is also necessarily and characteristically shaped by our imaginations: it is distinctively *human* reasoning, both in its form and its scope. On this basis, we can say that there is no reason without imagination.

Further, and perhaps less obviously, there is no imagination in the absence of reason: all our imaginations involve reason. First, it seems right to propose that common notions must underlie all of our unified perceptions, just as they underlie the composition of complex bodies: that is, real commonalities among existent modes are a necessary condition of our having unified perceptions, or of our associating one idea with another, at all. However, Spinoza offers at least the possibility that there are commonalities among modes which extend beyond the common notions, and of which the ideas in us are adequate, that is, ideas of reason. At *E2p39d*, Spinoza offers a more expansive version of the common notions principle, that some modes genuinely have more commonality among them than others, and that such commonality is known adequately:

Let A be that which is common to, and peculiar to, the human body and certain external bodies, which is equally in the human body and in the same external bodies, and finally, which is equally in the part of each external body and in the whole...Let it be posited now that the human

body is affected by an external body through what it has in common with it, that is, by A; the idea of this affection will involve property A (by P16) and so (by P7c) the idea of this affection, insofar as it involves property A, will be adequate in God...And so (by P11c) this idea is also adequate in the human mind. (E2p39d)

In other words, being affected by something whose existence has genuine commonalities with one's own has the result that one's idea of that thing will include an adequate idea of what there is in common. Of course, that does not mean that one is in a position to identify what is common or to distinguish it from what is not: the composite idea we conceive of that thing will still be inadequate. Nonetheless, those ideas in our imaginations which correspond to actual commonalities are adequate in the mind: the commonality is perceived adequately, if it is there to be perceived at all. So imaginations would not be formed in the absence of adequate ideas, albeit that these are unrecognised. Adequate ideas, or reason, underpin our capacity for making coherent conjunctions of inadequate ideas, that is, for imagining.

My thesis of hybrid knowing, therefore, demonstrates not only that reason and imagination are both involved in knowing, but that knowing necessarily involves combinations and interactions of imagination and reason. The goal of knowing better, then, is to understand more about the complex ideas that confront us and our relation to them and not, *per impossibile*, to replace imaginations with ideas of reason. We can improve our knowledge by making use of reliable methodological disciplines – for example, by taking a critical stance towards our existing knowledge claims and by showing the steps in our arguments, as Spinoza sets out to do by using a geometric presentation in the *Ethics* (Garrett, 2009) – but not by resolving to confine ourselves to the use of reason alone.

Spinoza does, of course, value reason highly: Part 5 of the *Ethics* cites the power of reason as the way to freedom, and throughout his works there are injunctions to 'live according to the guidance of reason'. But since 'reason' is undefined, other than in terms of its being founded in the common notions on the one hand, and in terms of its effects (for example, regarding things *sub specie*

aeternitatis, E2p44; striving only for understanding; E4p26; self-esteem, E4p52; increased power over the affects, E5p6) on the other, no interpretation of Spinoza's epistemology can capture the force of his endorsement of reason without some further elaboration of how it gives rise to actual knowledge claims. My interpretation avoids the need for specific commitments, explicit or otherwise, as to the content of Spinoza's idea of reason by focusing on the activity of reasoning. On my account, the 'reason' to which Spinoza appeals in Part 5 of the *Ethics* is a way of thinking which derives its value not from the purported pure adequacy of its content, but from its systematicity and its critical stance, such that it enables the knower to track how ideas, whether adequate or inadequate, follow from each other and thus to make progress in diagnosing the extent of privation in her knowledge. The special affective qualities of this way of thinking are explored in the next chapter.

6. Conclusion

I have argued that Spinoza's later work takes an interrogative rather than a normative approach to theorising knowledge, pressing us to understand *scientia intuitiva*, reason and imagination as complementary and coexistent aspects of knowing. Reason, in the form of common notions and adequate ideas of other common properties, is a prerequisite of our minds' imagining; the imaginations associated with our embodied existence shape both the content and the structure of our reasoning, making it distinctively human. The insights of *scientia intuitiva* are not mysterious – they are in principle available to human minds in virtue of their existence – but do not play a part in the enterprise of extending our understanding through *cognitio*, imagination and reason. I have also argued that the epistemology of the *Ethics* is a theory of knowing, rather than of knowledge: that we lose the force of Spinoza's epistemology if we treat it as taking as its object the truth or falsity of knowledge claims, rather than the making of knowledge claims by (human) thinkers or knowers. A focus on the activity of knowing and what it involves is, I believe, mandated by Spinoza's philosophy of mind: its picture of minds as lacking special faculties and as constituted and reconstituted by the ideas of their bodies and the ideas which they themselves form. By reading Spinoza's epistemology as concerned with the

business of human thinking we can start to consider how it is that human beings put their capacities for knowing to use, and what causes them to acquire, reinforce or indeed lose, the knowledge that they do. This will form the subject-matter of the next chapter, where I synthesise the accounts of Chapters 3 and 4 to propose that Spinoza should be understood as committed to an epistemology of affective knowing.

Chapter 5

Affective Knowing

In Chapter 4, I argued that Spinoza's theory of mind entails that all our articulated knowledge claims are complex ideas which are hybrid, that is, inadequate at least to some degree; and in Chapter 3 I proposed that affect marks the shift between the mind's perceiving something and the mind's knowing something in the sense of being in a position to become aware of it and respond to it. With these features in view I now move on to propose that the best way to interpret Spinoza's mature theory of knowledge in the *Ethics* is as an epistemology of affective knowing. In this chapter I elucidate this concept and situate it relative to other recent interpretations that acknowledge the affective dimension to Spinoza's theory of knowledge; I explore its implications for knowledge sharing and cooperation; and I argue that it shows how Spinoza's epistemology captures the dynamics of human knowing.

My claim that we should attribute to Spinoza a philosophy of affective knowing is grounded in the reading of Spinoza's theory of mind for which I have argued in the foregoing chapters: first, the role played by affect in making it possible to differentiate between ideas which are merely constitutive of minds and those which the mind can put to use, reflectively or otherwise; and second, the irreducibly hybrid nature of the ideas we form in the activity of knowing. According to my interpretation, Spinoza's philosophy of mind entails that knowing is a continuous activity of the mind, in which the mind constantly reaffirms or revises its existing state of knowledge according to fluctuations in its constitution and power as it forms its own ideas of affections in the body that is its object. I believe that the proposal of affective knowing for which I argue in this chapter reflects Spinoza's insistence that inadequate and adequate ideas follow with the same necessity (*E2p36*) and his recognition that adequate ideas do not drive out inadequate ones (*E2p35s*). The introduction of affectivity into the question of what it means to know gives a different character to talk of knowledge, making sense of why, in Spinoza's philosophy, inadequate ideas of imagination can retain their hold even when more adequate ideas are available and indeed known to a mind. Further, affective

knowing provides the basis for understanding innovations in human life and thought as transformative effects brought about through distinctively human inadequate ideas.

1. The Experience of Knowing

Affectivity is fundamental to Spinoza's philosophy of mind. Affect marks an increase or decrease in a mode's power of acting; so it is clear that the mind's ideas of affections of the body necessarily carry with them some affective content. When the mind acts to form an idea of some affection, that very action prompts affects of joy, both in the mind's exercising its power and in its reflection on its own power; at the same time, the largely imaginative content of the idea may be such as to generate an affect of sadness, with consequent feelings of disempowerment. Even this is an oversimplification: as is clear from the expositions of affect in Part 3 of the *Ethics*, the phenomenal, conscious affects which human beings experience are no reliable guide to our actual empowerment or disempowerment. So questions of the affective consequences and associations of ideas are fundamental to human knowing: to whether we seek to know better, to discipline our thoughts, or to revise our received ideas, and to the value we attribute to familiar and unfamiliar ideas. Spinoza's philosophy of mind shows us that the first-person experience of knowing – how knowing feels – is both epistemically and epistemologically significant: it influences our receptiveness to and ability to make use of novel affections and ideas, and it adds a further dimension to knowing which must be accounted for in the philosophical understanding of knowledge.

Spinoza signals the significance of the experience of knowing in the opening chapters of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, where the authority of prophecies reflects the ethical inclinations of the prophets (*TTP*2[10]) themselves, and the contents of prophecies reflect the imaginative powers and existing state of knowledge of the prophets who proclaim them (*TTP*1[45]-[47]; *TTP*2[15]) and their temperament (*TTP*2[13]-[14]). This exposition is primarily related to the thought that prophetic revelation is mediated through human beings, and must therefore be both expressible by some particular human being at some time and some place, and must be both recognizable and motivating to those who comprise its audience. In other words, in addition to its impact on the state of mind of the knowing subject, the affective content of ideas is important for epistemic motivation, credibility and evaluation.

The opening chapters of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* also demonstrate that there is a social dimension to the affective content of ideas in communication. Spinoza argues that, while prophets were certain of their revelations, they could be received with only moral certainty, because they were first understood by the prophet and then communicated to others by means of imaginations, that is, inadequate ideas. Consequently, the revelations of prophets were also vulnerable to a certain conservatism of thought:

The Prophets who prophesied nothing new, but only what was contained in the Law of Moses, did not need a sign, because they were confirmed by the Law. E.g., the Prophecy of Jeremiah concerning the destruction of Jerusalem was confirmed by the Prophecies of the rest of the prophets, and by the threats of the Law. So it did not need a sign. But Hananiah, contrary to all the Prophets, prophesied a speedy restoration of the city. So he needed a sign. Without one he would have had to doubt his Prophecy until the occurrence of the thing he predicted confirmed his Prophecy. (*TTP2*[11])

The affective content in ideas is therefore influential in knowing because it influences both the conviction of the knower and the degree of receptivity that ideas can command when communicated. The experience of knowing makes all the difference to whether and how we are receptive to new encounters and capable of exercising the epistemic virtue of critically assessing our existing ideas.

2. The Relation between Ideas and Affects

One question raised by my proposal that all knowing is affective is that of how the relation between ideas and affects is to be understood in Spinoza's writings. As explained in Chapter 3, my interpretation suggests that ideas become present to the mind in its conscious experience only through affect. Here I develop that line of thought further; in doing so, I draw on work by Shapiro (2012) which foregrounds the close connection between imagination and affect in Spinoza's work. I endorse Shapiro's central thesis that imaginations in Spinoza should be understood as having an affective dimension; but I contest her argument for interpreting Spinoza as setting up an identification of imagination and affect. Rather, I argue that, while a person's mind is constituted by the ideas she has, the affective orientation of those ideas determines her

capacity for reflexively developing that power and thus for extending and improving her knowledge.

Noting that Spinoza states that the mind imagines when the body is affected in a way that involves the nature of an external body (*E2p17*) and represents the external body as present (*E2p17s*), Shapiro suggests that there are two possible ways to interpret this claim. Spinoza may be putting forward a theory of representation in which ideas of objects are not intrinsically affective but attach to affective states of the mind, so giving rise to imaginations; or he may be binding imagination and affect together, such that 'imagination' and affect' are simply different ways of describing the same phenomenon. She argues that Spinoza's rejection of the mind's capacity to represent external things by resemblance rules out the first option. She further adduces textual evidence in support of the latter option: for example, that the derivations of all the non-primitive affects involve implicit reference to imaginations ("...accompanied by the idea of an external cause..." (*E3p13s* & ff)); and that Spinoza characterises the interplay of affects by invoking imaginations: for example, "If we imagine that anything pleasurable affects some object of our love, we shall be affected with love towards that thing" (*E3p22* and numerous other examples). On these grounds, Shapiro concludes that the *Ethics* identifies imaginations with affects: she argues that the non-primitive affects are inseparable from their imaginative content and that, in consequence, the imaginations themselves must be considered as affects:

Insofar as affects such as love, hatred, inclination, hope, fear, and so on, are distinct species of increase or decrease of power to act, and so distinct from the joy or sadness which figure in them, it must be the case that the imaginative dimension of these affects itself impacts our power to act. Moreover, it is clear that our imaginations themselves have this differential impact... (2012 p96)

In further support of this interpretation, Shapiro appeals to the role of imagination in the mind's power of striving to persist in being, such as where Spinoza claims that, "The mind...strives to imagine those things, which increase or help the power of activity in the body" (*E3p12*). She points out that the argument of Part 3 of the *Ethics*, which demonstrates the derivation of the definitions of phenomenal emotions, explicitly alludes to the mind mobilising the forces of the imagination to counteract sad passions in response to threatened or actual decreases in its power of acting:

We can increase our power of persevering in existence simply by calling to mind those things that benefit us. The imagination itself impacts our power. That is, an imagination is properly speaking an affect, according to the definition of [*Ethics*] part 3. (Shapiro, 2012 p96)

Shapiro's interpretation has the advantage of foregrounding the important relation between affects and imaginations that emerges from Spinoza's argument in Part 3 of the *Ethics*. It also reflects Spinoza's argument that the ideas of imagination are not *mere* images (E2p48s; E2p49s), if imaginations have irreducibly affective content they can clearly be understood as making a difference to the power of the imagining subject. Shapiro further claims that a reading of the *Ethics* which identifies imaginations as affects helps to explain why Spinoza makes imagination, rather than perception, the most basic epistemic category in the *Ethics*: affect provides imagination with an ordering principle, striving to persevere in being, which makes it possible to appreciate, at least in principle, how ideas come to be a particular way of understanding the world around us, rather than merely a confused counterpart of the innumerable encounters between bodies. Thus, "we take as existing the things we do because of how we are affected" (2012, p97).

This identification between imaginations and affects goes beyond the claim for which I argued in Chapter 3, that ideas are present in conscious thought as imaginations if and only if they have had some affective impact on us, to make the stronger claim that imaginations *are* affects. Interesting and appealing though Shapiro's reading is, I believe that the textual warrant for identifying imaginations with affects is highly contestable. Of course, it must be true that the phenomenal, or secondary, affects - ambition, hope, and so forth - are imaginations: indeed, they are the imaginative names given to the affects of which Spinoza seeks to understand the causes and properties in Part 3 of the *Ethics*. Shapiro bases her stronger claim on the thought that "...love, hatred, inclination, hope, fear and so on, are *distinct species* of increase or decrease of power to act, and so distinct from the joy or sadness which figure in them..." (p96, my emphasis). The contents of the various scholia in which Spinoza infers the character of various affects from Spinoza's account of psychological activities and relations do not appear to support this. Indeed, Spinoza's overall argument in Part 3 of the *Ethics* is structured so as to demonstrate the opposite principle: that all of the particular affective phenomena

which constitute the explananda of a theory of affect are manifestations of only three primary, that is, essential or explanatory, affects (*E3p11s*) and, equally importantly, that ‘desire’, ‘joy’ and ‘sadness’ are themselves imaginative descriptions that mark the more fundamental fact of increases or decreases in the individual’s power.

Shapiro recognises that Spinoza’s text appears to identify and maintain a distinction between imagination and affect, but argues that “there is but a distinction of reason between the content of an imagination and the manner of conceiving that content” (2012, p100). While I agree with Shapiro that there can be no conscious imagination in the absence of affect, assimilating imagination to affect seems to lose the force of Spinoza’s consistent theme in defining the affects, that the phenomenal emotion is a primitive affect *accompanied by* an idea of an external cause, that is, an imagination. In other words, the definitions of the affects foreground a differentiation between imaginations and their affective content. It is right to say that the exercise of analysing a single perceived phenomenon – an affect – into distinct items of content – perceived emotion, principal affect and idea of an external cause – is one of making distinctions of reason; but since this is Spinoza’s answer to the project of understanding the affects, those distinctions cannot be simply set aside.

Despite these concerns, Shapiro’s interpretation of Spinoza’s theory of affect has some compelling insights. The first of these is that our imaginations shape our knowledge of the world - that “We take as existing the things we do because of how we are affected” (2012, p 97). The second, following on from this, is that our imaginations structure and make sense of things as we encounter them - “Imagination...sets up landmarks in the ever-changing causal order; it stabilizes the world in which we find ourselves, allowing us to make our way in it” (2012, p102). I believe that these important aspects of Shapiro’s interpretation can be upheld independently of the contestable identification of imagination with affect. In my reading of Spinoza’s epistemology as a theory of affective knowing. I therefore affirm the interpretation of affect as a disruption of *conatus* proposed in section 6 of Chapter 3 to endorse the weaker principle, that every imagination of which the mind is aware is associated with some affect of joy or sadness, such that a redirection of *conatus* from its inertial trajectory and the accompanying increase or decrease in power brings about that very awareness. It goes without saying that the affect is not separable from the idea in

experience; the outcome of Spinoza's investigation of the affects is to map a conceptual distinction between imagination and affect which has significance for our better understanding, not only of the affects themselves but also of the nature of our knowledge. Appreciating that our knowledge of the world is conditioned by our concepts, and the affects that grounded or prompted the mind's formation of those concepts, is an integral part of that project.

The conceptual distinction between imagination and affect has importance for our ability to appreciate and make use of Spinoza's epistemology: it elucidates what knowing consists in, it presses us to understand knowing as both embedded in and shaping our relations with other modes, and it locates our knowing within our efforts to bring about effects that will bolster and further increase our power. On the first point, the inadequate ideas of our imagination derive their force in our thinking from the affects, or changes in power, with which they are associated: other things equal, the affective associations of our ideas persist with those ideas. On the second point, beginning to overcome the privation of knowledge involved in our inadequate ideas requires appreciating and appraising our affective attachment to those ideas. On the third, our inadequate ideas are the source of our minds' creativity, an ability to bring about distinctively human transformational effects in the world. I elaborate further on each of these points below.

3. Knowing and Affective Association

My concept of affective knowing reads Spinoza as seeking to theorise the activity of knowing, rather than to provide a framework for evaluating specific knowledge claims. Nonetheless, it has implications for how we should understand the knowledge claims, both explicit and implicit (or embedded) that shape individual knowers' understanding of their experiences. In Chapter 3 I argued that all ideas of which the mind is conscious necessarily have affective content: this is indicated by the fact that these ideas are consciously entertained, and that such consciousness can arise only from their effect on the mind's power of acting. In Chapter 4 I proposed that all of our knowledge claims necessarily involve both adequate and inadequate ideas, and that this undermines the significance of Spinoza's labelling knowledge in terms of imagination, reason and

scientia intuitiva. Here, I bring these interpretations together to show that affective associations form an ineliminable element of all our knowledge claims.

Spinoza gives us a dynamic picture of the mind's thinking: tracking affections of the body in the course of encounters among modes; forming ideas of those affections and of connections between them; retaining its ideas unless and until they are 'excluded' by other ideas. I have argued that Part 3 of the *Ethics* shows that this process is intrinsically affective, in that affect both determines our awareness of ideas and marks their effect on our power of acting. In its affective thinking, the mind is both active and passive, forming its own ideas of perceptions of bodily affections, and Spinoza is concerned to emphasise the difference between ideas formed by the mind and mere images:

Those who think that ideas consist in images which are formed in us...regard ideas as though they were inanimate pictures on a panel, and, filled with this misconception, do not see that an idea, insofar as it is an idea, involves an affirmation or negation. (*E2p49s*)

In forming ideas, then, the mind also affirms its ideas: it takes its ideas to relate to or resemble their objects, failing to recognise the privations of knowledge that they involve (*E2p35*). The affirmation involved in a mind's ideas means that all knowing carries with it some intrinsic epistemic *commitment*: the ideas that comprise an individual's knowledge are not available to her mind independently of their affirmations, or to use as mere tools for thinking¹. In knowing affectively, the mind acts by affirming the ideas it has, resisting the passivity involved in forming countervailing or conflicting ideas.

Our thinking thus always involves affirmation, or endorsement, of our existing state of knowledge, even while the reasons for such endorsement remain opaque to us. Paradoxically, this may mean that the mind affirms ideas with disempowering affective content, just because they are its ideas and therefore involve affirmation of its own activity, notwithstanding their painful associations. Similarly, the fact that the mind comprises multiple complex ideas means that its epistemic commitments are often both confused and unstable. Our affirmation of ideas re-enacts the experience of the affect

¹This provides a further interesting contrast with the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, where Spinoza suggests that "the intellect, by its native strength, makes for itself intellectual instruments, whereby it acquires strength for performing other intellectual operations..." (*TIE* §31)

that originally accompanied the idea, causing a commensurate increase or decrease in our power; insofar as some other idea that we form has a bearing on the ideas constituting our existing state of knowledge, a complex configuration of increases or decreases in our power ensues, which Spinoza describes as vacillation of mind (*E3p17s*).

Spinoza's theories of imagination and affectivity thus enjoin us to see ideas in the mind as deriving their durability and power from a number of factors, of which the adequate, active element in their content is only one. Ideas will exert power within the mind according to the strength of affect associated with them, whether passive or active, and the vividness of both the images and the affects they involve (*E4App.30*; *E5p11*). This vividness derives from an idea's phenomenal qualities as well as from its relative distinctness and its degree of commonality with other ideas (*E5p6s*; *E5p13*). Thus a highly vivid idea that is reinforced by being associated with a range of objects, or by being frequently encountered by or suggested to the mind through affects, will persist in the mind, regardless of its adequacy, as Spinoza demonstrates through the example of our inadequate imagination of the sun:

[W]hen we look at the sun, we imagine it as about two hundred feet away from us, an error which does not consist simply in this imagining, but in the fact that while we imagine it in this way, we are ignorant of its true distance and of the cause of this imagining. For even if we later come to know that it is more than six hundred diameters of the earth away from us, we nevertheless imagine it as near. For we imagine the sun so near, not because we do not know its true distance, but because an affection of our body involves the essence of the sun, in so far as our body is affected by the sun. (*E2p35s*)

Here we see that, notwithstanding that my imagination of the sun, derived from the way it affects my body, is false in the sense that it misrepresents (at least) the distance between the sun and me, it persists in the face of my gaining a more adequate idea of the distance of the sun from the earth. The imaginative idea is not excluded by the scientific measurement, regardless of their relative accuracy, because it represents truly the fact that my body is affected by the sun in a certain way. If I accept the scientific measurement, then I do not believe that the sun is about two hundred feet away, but my idea of the sun retains some of my original imagination, which is reaffirmed each time I am affected by it.

This suggests that the hybrids of adequate and inadequate ideas that comprise the complex ideas of which a knower is aware make those ideas resilient in the face of even the most diligent and rigorous efforts at epistemic discipline. The trajectory of knowing is not one of inadequate ideas being held and subsequently discarded as a result of the knower's forming more adequate ideas that exclude them, as might be suggested by a naive reading of *E2p17*. Rather, her complex ideas will be *modified* by ideas that *partially* exclude elements of them. What is adequate in her complex ideas is ineliminable (*E2p43d*); of the inadequate content, some elements are less likely than others to be excluded by another idea. An inadequate idea (or an inadequate element of a complex idea) will be more or less durable on the basis of the very factors that contribute to the mind's forming and retaining or recollecting any idea: the vividness of its image (*E5p12*); the frequency with which encounters with other ideas cause the mind to think of it (*E5p11*); the number or range of ideas with which it is associated (*E5p13*); and the affective content of the idea, that is, the extent to which it generates the joy which the mind associates with an increase in its power (*E3p59*). Thus the affective associations involved in our knowing ensure that our inadequate ideas are more persistent than we are in a position to realise.

A further consequence of affective association is that our ability to share knowing is dependent on an epistemic background of existing shared concepts and attitudes. The predicament of the Old Testament prophets alluded to above in some way afflicts us all: when we seek to communicate our knowledge to others, or they to us, we rely explicitly on the existence of shared concepts, language or signs to mediate the communication, but also implicitly on a shared hinterland of knowledge and evaluation. Insofar as our concepts contain adequate ideas, such as common notions, they express genuine commonality and generate joyful affect associated with the recognition of that commonality, and so assist mutual understanding and comprehension. Insofar as our concepts involve inadequate ideas, however, they are shared by us only partially: we bring our own particular affective associations to them, both in expression and in reception (*E3p51*).

The foregoing may suggest that only imaginative knowledge is affective, and that affect necessarily impedes knowing better by generating epistemic resistance, but this is far from necessarily the case. First, Spinoza specifies that when the mind acts, and

therefore expresses some adequate idea, it experiences affects of joy or desire only (E3p58). As argued in the previous chapter, all human knowing involves a hybrid of adequate and inadequate ideas; similarly, those ideas bring with them both empowering and disempowering affects. Which most influences the outcome of our efforts to know will depend on the content, context and range of the encounters we have (E5p8-9). Further, Spinoza differentiates between affects which are contrary to our nature, and which therefore prevent understanding, and the joyful affects – whether the fragile effects of joyful imaginations or the necessarily joyful effects of adequate ideas – which promote understanding (E4p26-p27; E5p10). Affectivity, therefore, is not opposed to epistemic virtue, but an intrinsic part of it.

This can be seen especially clearly in Part 5 of the *Ethics*, where Spinoza argues for the power of the mind to govern affects, on the one hand, and to experience *beatitudo*, on the other. I argued in Chapter 4 that Spinoza differentiates among *scientia intuitiva*, reason and imagination as a heuristic aid to his philosophical readers, rather than as a genuine division among kinds of knowledge. Nonetheless, both reason and *scientia intuitiva* comprise understanding in the form of adequate ideas – of commonalities among the entities of nature in the case of reason, and of God and singular things in the case of *scientia intuitiva*. Experiencing the affects of joy and striving associated with adequate ideas generates an impetus to experience them further, or to know better:

...all the appetites or desires, are passions only insofar as they arise from inadequate ideas, and are counted as virtues when they are aroused or generated by adequate ideas. For all the desires by which we are determined to do something can arise as much from adequate ideas as from inadequate ones...[W]e can devise no other remedy for the affects which depends on our power and is more excellent than this which consists in true knowledge of them. (E5p4s)

The more the mind is capable of understanding things by the third kind of knowledge, the more it desires to understand them by this kind of knowledge. (E5p26)

Thus all kinds of knowledge are affective; and, Spinoza holds, qualitative improvements in our understanding generate affects which press us to continue extending our understanding. It does not require us to use our cognitive capacities to identify our

adequate ideas and distil them from the adequate ones in order to pursue a state of perfect knowing; rather, the joyful affect generated by our adequate ideas urges us on to know more, and to know more joyfully. On my thesis of hybrid knowing, this affective drive to improving our knowledge is present in all of our ideas to a greater or lesser extent; the development of epistemic virtues is a matter of placing ourselves in the best position to exercise this affective drive by adopting practices which are conducive to identifying and overcoming the privations in our knowledge.

4. Overcoming Privation

Affective knowing suggests both that our attachment to our knowledge claims is more than likely to go beyond the warrant we have for them and that the range of actual epistemic commitments that constrain a knower's thinking will be much broader than she may appreciate. The ideas to which a knower is committed need not constitute her actual beliefs: rather, they make up her epistemological and affective hinterland, as it were: ideas to which she is *unreflectively* committed, without necessarily appreciating that they figure in her knowing. In Shapiro's terms, they shape how she understands the world and how she is able to make her way in it: what she knows and how she knows it. In this sense, they play a part similar to that of the common notions: they inform the knower's thinking and ground her epistemic capabilities, without themselves being either articulated or acknowledged fully. And like the common notions, the affective content of a knower's ideas is not necessarily distinctly available to awareness.

Further, our evaluation of our own epistemic warrant is itself unavoidably compromised by the fact that our knowledge claims always have some affective dimension. The mind's understanding of how its ideas are associated is both intrinsically inadequate and reflective of the affective manifestation of the mind's own striving; but in forming this understanding, the mind acts and so experiences joy. The mind's reflexive experience of joy in exercising its power occurs in in two ways. First, the mind experiences joy in regarding itself and its own power of activity (E3p53); additionally, the mind further experiences joy in conceiving adequate ideas (E3p58). The second of these joyful experiences is purely active: the mind is active in being the adequate cause of an idea. The first, however, is a passion: the mind strives to increase its power by reflecting on its own power, but is to a degree passive in relation to these

reflections, because it can know itself only through the modifications of the body (E2p23). Thus some of the joy that the mind experiences at its own power is passive joy, associated with an inadequate idea of its active joy.

The full extent of the epistemic constraint implied by this problematic of active and passive joys comes into view when we consider that, as I explained in Chapter 4, most of the ideas that the mind forms are complex ideas, and thus inadequate to some degree. The mind must experience some degree of active joy in all of its ideas: for forming *any* idea is an activity of the mind (E3d3n). Thus, complex but largely inadequate ideas are sources of both active and passive joys in the mind; and even the unadulterated active joy associated with adequate ideas is accompanied by the second-order passive joy of the mind's perceiving its own joy. In short, our knowledge claims are intrinsically self-reinforcing, regardless of their adequacy or lack of it. Our delight in our own acting thus renders our epistemic position not only intrinsically fallible but also prone to acute over-confidence.

Spinoza accentuates the point by proposing that the mind's joy at regarding its own power increases when also affirmed by others:

This joy is more and more encouraged the more the man imagines himself to be praised by others. For the more he imagines himself to be praised by others, the greater the joy with which he imagines himself to affect others, a joy accompanied by the idea of himself (by p29s). And so, (by p27) he himself is affected with greater joy, accompanied by the idea of himself, q.e.d.. (E3p53c)

Here we see that in social contexts the interplay of active and passive joys which is involved in the mind's exercising its own power may be accompanied and augmented by a third-order passive affect of joy associated with the reception of oneself by others. This only serves to exacerbate the difficulty of appreciating the privations of one's epistemic position. The multiple passive aspects of joy in knowing bring it about that a knower will persistently form inadequate and unreliable ideas of both her knowledge claims and her mind's actual power of acting.

The result is a persistent tendency for human beings to overstate their own knowledge: the mind constantly seeks to replicate and increase the joyful affect associated with its own activity, but in doing so, it is liable to mistake the passive joy of

regarding its own power for the active joy of adequate ideas. The mind *desires* to experience the active joy; thus it will desire adequacy in its ideas; but this very desire may cause it to misattribute adequacy to its ideas. This, I suggest, is one reason why Spinoza's political philosophy does not give philosophers, or sages, any greater standing than other citizens in terms of their ability or right to influence the sovereign power, despite the fact that he affirms that philosophy is unique in having truth as its goal: sincerely seeking truth is not sufficient to make it the case that philosophers in fact *have* truths or adequate ideas, even if it were unambiguously advantageous for such ideas to shape laws and institutions. Indeed, Spinoza repeatedly suggests that the history and contemporary practice of philosophy demonstrate that philosophers have either overstated or overestimated the adequacy of their ideas (e.g. *E1App*; *E3Pref*). The experience of joy in one's philosophical reflections is not only a poor guide to their quality, it may also compromise one's ability to philosophise better.

The picture of knowing compromised by a complex web of affective attachments means that method is especially important to Spinoza: it is what enables human beings to reflect upon the relative merits of their ideas and whether they support or exclude each other. The *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* emphasises the importance of method and the advantages of setting out or acquiring knowledge in the proper order (*TIE*§44), while the geometric presentation of the *Ethics* can be seen as a demonstration of the advantages of disciplining one's thought. Garrett (2003) draws attention to the geometric presentation as exemplifying certain *virtues* of reasoning and exposition (transparency, force, scale etc.) which help to show how the argument is constructed and make it easier to follow. Despite the shift of emphasis between the *Treatise* and the *Ethics* as to the characterization of knowledge, I agree with Garrett that we should read Spinoza as seeing method as an epistemic virtue, the practice of which is able to act as a countervailing force to the misleading self-congratulatory joys generated by the passive affects. Insofar as knowledge is reflexive, a commitment to knowing well counts as an epistemically valuable *attitude* towards knowledge claims and the enterprise of knowing: an affect that assists, rather than hinders, the attempt to increase the adequacy of our ideas.

Already in the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* Spinoza suggests that the value of method lies in its therapeutic or corrective effects, rather than its conclusions:

[W]hen the mind devotes itself to any thought, so as to examine it, and to deduce therefrom in due order all the legitimate conclusions possible, any falsehood which may lurk in the thought will be detected; but if the thought be true, the mind will readily proceed without interruption to deduce truths from it. (*TIE*§104)

The psychology developed in Part 3 of the *Ethics* demonstrates that this is a more hazardous enterprise than the *Treatise* may suggest. Nonetheless, once we accept the affective realities of our epistemic endeavours, critical reflection on our thinking can enable us to avoid over-commitment to our ideas while still making use of their content and insights. Spinoza's idea of 'living according to the guidance of reason' may then be understood, not as some particular, rarified way of life for philosophers, but living according to the dictates of one's best epistemic practices, supported by the joyful affect generated by expressing the adequate ideas that one has.

The theory of mind and affect developed in the *Ethics* also sheds a different light on the epistemic application of such critical method. The methodological prescription of the *Treatise* aims at perfecting knowledge, but the affective psychology of the *Ethics* undermines the purported usefulness of such perfectionist goals. Rather, method empowers the knower by mobilising her commitment to a general principle which both acts as a countervailing force to her passive joy at her mind's power and mitigates her passive sorrow at the inadequacy of her ideas by revealing their privations, thus weakening their hold on her. Further, in lessening her commitment to her inadequate ideas, it increases her openness to being affected and thus enhances her potential for extending her epistemic repertoire (*E2p39*). Therefore, Spinoza's affective psychology makes it the case that the epistemic virtue of method in the *Ethics* is one in which the mind actively mobilises both its power of thinking and its capacity for being affected, to critical and creative effect.

5. Transformation and Creativity

I have argued that interpreting Spinoza's epistemology as a theory of affective knowing suggests that all of our knowledge is primarily constituted of inadequate ideas and that, in most domains of inquiry, the outcome of even our best epistemic endeavours is some mitigation of the privations in our knowledge, rather than attaining adequate ideas of things. This has prompted some commentators to complain that Spinoza holds a very pessimistic view of human epistemic capability¹. I suggest that the reverse is the case: Spinoza celebrates the creative, dynamic potential of human knowing. I argue for this position, not on the basis of Spinoza's remarks on blessedness, the intellectual love of God and the eternal part of the mind (*E5p33* & ff), but from a reading of Spinoza that identifies potential for creating new forms of empowerment in human beings' inadequate ideas and the affectivity associated with them.

This may seem counterintuitive: on my account of affective hybrid knowing, it is clear that our ideas are predominantly inadequate, with largely passive affective content. And even commentators who argue that Spinoza gives a positive role to imaginations tend to see inadequate ideas and their associated passivity as standing in the way of our ability to extend our knowledge. For example, James (2012b) suggests:

...passive affects hold us back. By distorting and mutilating our grasp of the world and ourselves they hinder our capacity to think, so that if we are to cultivate the activity proper to human minds we must do our best to transcend them. (2012b, p76)

James concedes that Spinoza views neighbourly love and social organisation as necessary for creating the conditions in which philosophical understanding can flourish, and as such can be viewed as helping us to think; but holds that such facts of neighbourliness and sociability are nonetheless distinct from reasoning. My interpretation of Spinoza's epistemology is obviously in tension with any reading which posits a hard distinction between imagination and reasoning; in this section of the chapter I seek to overcome this tension by drawing out some of the consequences of the expressionist reading of Spinoza's philosophy proposed in Chapter 2. I press an appreciation of phenomena such as social organisation and neighbourly love as

¹ For example, Schliesser (2013); Parkinson (1954).

distinctively human transformative effects of hybrid knowing, inextricable from human beings' capacity for being affected and hence importantly related to and conditioned by their inadequate ideas. Affective knowing deploys adequate and inadequate ideas together, generating new ideas which are themselves imbued with affect and which will determine the direction and content of further knowing, all of which is available to, albeit not transparent to, critical reflection.

On the basis of Spinoza's account of the mind and affect in Parts 2 and 3 of the *Ethics*, I have argued that a mode's ideas of its encounters are both inadequate in relation to their objects and stamped with affectivity signalling those objects' effects on the mode's power of acting. Nonetheless, in forming its inadequate idea, the mode expresses both its experiences of undergoing the encounter and its response to the encounter: that is, its complex idea of the encounter will include both inadequate and adequate content, manifesting both passivity and activity. Here I argue that understanding Spinoza's epistemology in terms of affective knowing enables us to appreciate how those active and passive elements are mobilised in the undertaking of human reasoning.

Inadequate ideas are themselves a kind of transformative effect within the mind: they are ideas unique to that human being, corresponding to some bodily affection of that human being, and they express that human being's affective response, striving to maintain or increase power in the face of some encounter. Further, inadequate ideas are themselves available as objects of which the mind may form additional ideas, reflecting both its response to the increase or decrease in power accompanying them and any phenomenal affect in which that shift in power may be manifested². Such additional ideas may take the form of curiosity as to an idea's causes or consequences; dissatisfaction with what an idea appears to affirm; inspiration at an idea's apparent truth or force. The question arises, however, as to what can prompt the mind to engage in such further consideration, including critical evaluation, of ideas which, on Spinoza's own account, the mind *affirms* in the absence of ideas which would exclude it. I draw on an interpretation of wonder by Rosenthal (2010) to argue that the prompt to overcome our affirmation of an idea is the experience of wonder. Wonder interrupts our

² There may, of course, not be any such phenomenal affect; an increase or decrease in power may not be consciously realised.

affirmation and the affects and conjunctions of ideas that underpin it; it alerts us to some inadequacy in our ideas, in the form of incompleteness or contrariness, and gives scope for reflection and revision. Appreciating the part played by wonder in disrupting our habitual patterns of thought also allows us to consider the impact of wonder on our ideas of encounters with other modes: to mobilise the mind's activity towards a productive rethinking of those encounters.

Spinoza considers wonder in Part 3 of the *Ethics*, but seems to deny that it is, strictly speaking, one of the affects; rather, it is the (imaginative) idea of something which the mind does not connect with any other idea (*E3DefAff4*). Nonetheless, wonder is able to modify affects, giving rise to second-order affects such as consternation, veneration, dread and so forth. Spinoza characterises wonder as forcing us to step outside our habitual thoughts and connections of ideas:

When we suppose that we imagine in an object something singular, which we have never seen before, we are only saying that when the mind considers that object, it has nothing in itself which it is led to consider from considering that. And so it is determined to consider only that. (*E3p52d*)

Wonder marks our forming an idea of something new, which we perceive neither “from the common order of nature” nor by being “determined internally...to understand” (*E2p29s*). As such, although Spinoza states that wonder is an imagination, the content of such an imagination remains obscure: the mind cannot give its perception conceptual content, because such conceptual content would require it to resemble some other thing, thus removing its singularity³. Further, wonder is not a species of joy or sadness; so it does not mark a passage to greater or lesser perfection, or an increase or decrease in the mind's power of acting. Rather, it stops us in our tracks until we have found some way to make sense of it, to connect it to other ideas.

This stalling of our mind may be seen as unproductive or even damaging for progressing our thought. For example, Lord (2016) suggests that Spinoza's wonder is an

³ As we are considering complex ideas, we do not need to think that the object of wonder literally has nothing at all in its composition that is common to other things. For example, this would exclude any physical object from prompting wonder, as all bodies have something in common. Similarly, Spinoza cites veneration as wonder at someone's exceptional characteristics: one can wonder at some particular feature of a person or thing familiar in other respects.

obstacle to knowledge, blocking processes of imagining and imaginative connection. Certainly it seems as though there is no guarantee that enlightenment or understanding will follow an experience of wonder. Spinoza's treatment of miracles in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, for example, cites wonder as evidence of ignorance rather than of knowledge (*TTP*6[14]). Remaining in a state of wonder seems to be in conflict with our being able to know better; however, that does not preclude wonder from another epistemically productive function: operating as a catalyst for knowing better, by prompting us to reflect on or investigate what it is that has brought us to a state of wonder. For example, Spinoza argues that devotion associated with wonder can be transformed into simple love by repeated imaginings of the object of wonder (*Def.Aff.XExp*), indicating that wonder can be overcome by repetition and habituation.

It seems right, then, to say that a state of wonder does not itself confer any knowledge: in that it indicates both a lack of the conceptual fit which would enable it to serve in either imagination or reasoning, and an absence of the affective shift which accompanies the mind acting to form ideas. But the fact that wonder marks an exception to our existing narratives about how things stand in the world means that it is also a pivot on which the mind can turn to new thoughts, which may involve revising ideas previously taken as evident. Those new thoughts need not be superstitions; they might just as easily be a resolve to investigate the object of wonder and refine one's existing frame of reference if appropriate. Considering the observation of a bioluminescent fish, for example, Lord rightly points out that the observer's initial sense of wonder obstructs her from making the associative moves that would enable her to recognise that some of its properties conform with those of other fish. However, subsequently coming to make those associative connections will not – or need not – dispel the sense of wonder. Rather, the wonder will be refocused – toward the conjunction of the existence of a fish and the emitting of light, rather than the total phenomenon of the fish – such that it may prompt the observer to investigate how and why this fish produces light and others do not. Since the state of wonder represents an interruption to the existing conceptual frameworks by which one makes sense of one's inadequate ideas of encounters with other modes (such as, 'fish are not a source of light'), it also acts as a strong impetus to find out, by speculation or investigation,

whether and how anomalous phenomena can be accommodated within those conceptual frameworks.

Further, knowing is not always a matter of seeking to know better the objects of the ideas we form in encounters with other modes. In Chapter 3 I argued that affectivity signals a shift in *conatus*: that our experience of affect marks changes in our power of acting brought about by our responses to encounters with other modes, rather than by the encounters themselves. That is, our response is not only a matter of forming an idea of some thing, but of making use of that idea in our striving to persist in being. In the case of wonder our power of acting does not change, but rather pauses: our existing state of knowledge does not equip us to respond with an idea that seeks our self-empowerment by integrating this new encounter into our existing understanding. Wonder, in other words, may be understood as the effect on us of some situation or relation, as much as of some object, which challenges our standing repertoire of epistemic commitments and responses. As such, it marks an imperative for us to make creative use of the ideas we already have, in order either to accommodate this disconnected idea within our existing understanding or to reshape our understanding: to devise some new approach to making our way in the world, which can embrace it and account for its challenge to our former understanding. Wonder both acts as a signal to engage in such accommodation or reshaping and, by disrupting our habitual responses, provides occasion to shift our thinking in relevant ways. In other words, once we appreciate Spinoza's account of wonder as a kind of epistemic pivot or hinge, we can see how the hybrid knowing by which we form new ideas in response to encounters can also be a source of genuine creativity and innovation in thought. Thus wonder, even though not an affect in that it neither enhances nor diminishes power of acting, may be seen to play a significant part in affective knowing: it is what prompts us to respond to changed circumstances by expressing our power in new ways.

Affective knowing involves us giving meaning to our encounters, and thereby generating distinctively human transformative effects, which go beyond those involved in the biological processes required for us to persist as living organisms. The effects in question – including tools, shelters, artefacts, governments, belief systems, ways of communicating – are determined by human beings' capacities for being affected, but also reshape those capacities by bringing into being new entities which can affect us in

their turn. Wonder, as alerting us to something previously not encountered or perceived, is the original impetus to our bringing about these innovative transformational effects, and therefore is an intrinsic element in affective knowing, being at the root of the creativity with which human beings seek to empower themselves.

6. Conclusion

I have argued that my reading of Spinoza's epistemology as a theory of affective knowing captures the treatment of the human mind in the *Ethics* as both fragile and fallible and as enabling human beings to live in ways which extend their power in distinctive ways. Affectivity is essential to how we form our ideas; as such, all of our knowledge is marked with affective attachments, including our delight in our own power of acting, which often stand in the way of our efforts to improve our knowledge. Despite the ways in which affective attachments to ideas may jeopardise our epistemic efforts, projects which seek to eliminate affectivity from knowing are both doomed to failure and wrongly motivated, failing to appreciate the extent to which human beings' power of thinking and knowing is extended through their bodily affective repertoire. Spinoza's epistemology shows that both our explicit knowledge claims and our tacit epistemic commitments consist of ideas that are always partially inadequate and which have affective significance for the knower.

I have therefore proposed that Spinoza's theory of knowledge should be understood as intrinsically affective and as focused on creating a plausible account of the dynamics of knowing as an effect of the mind, rather than on identifying epistemic criteria or the evaluation of specific knowledge claims. This I summarise as his theory of affective knowing. I have indicated that this enables us to appreciate human knowledge as a manifestation of *conatus*, in which human beings are both receptive and responsive to encounters with other modes in striving to persevere in their being. I have also pointed to some suggestive consequences of my interpretation: that all knowledge is underpinned by affective epistemic commitments which stand in need of investigation and understanding; that method and openness to being affected are complementary resources in the endeavour to know better; and that wonder is not a burden on the mind, but a fundamental requirement for the creative knowing by which human beings

are able to bring about a wide and expanding repertoire of transformative effects. In summary, reading Spinoza as holding a theory of affective knowing yields a picture of both knowing and knowledge as developmental and expansive, situated in and thus determined by specific circumstances but offering the resources to go beyond the mere replication of existing experiences or beliefs. In Chapter 6 I deploy the insights of this thesis of affective knowing to explore how understanding states and sociability as distinctively human transformative effects can address some of the interpretive issues in Spinoza's political philosophy.

Chapter 6

Knowing as Creating the Political

I have demonstrated that Spinoza's philosophy of mind and the associative psychological mechanisms elaborated in Parts 2 and 3 of the *Ethics* entail that all human knowledge involves inadequate ideas and an ineliminable affective aspect. As such, all human knowledge comprises some inadequacy, or privation, and is necessarily permeated with affective associations and (overt or tacit) commitments. In Chapter 2 I argued, *contra* Deleuze, that inadequate ideas are expressive and indeed play a pivotal role in expression and the individuation of modes; I then built on this to propose in Chapter 3 that both a mode's inadequate ideas and its receptivity to affections should be understood as manifestations of its active striving to persevere in being, rather than merely as indications of its passivity. This chapter will interrogate how Spinoza's philosophy reveals that human beings bring about distinctive effects through their affective knowing, identifying the political as one class of such effects and using the example of the concept of freedom to illustrate the significance of this insight for Spinoza's political philosophy.

First, I consider the implications of a theory of affective knowing for modes' power, showing that power can be systematically and cumulatively increased through inadequate ideas as well as adequate ones. In doing so, I contest individualist interpretations of Spinoza which focus on ideas as beliefs held by particular modes, shifting the focus of inquiry to the effects which modes bring about through the ideas they form. I follow readings of Spinoza which focus on the rôle of fictions in generating cooperation and collaboration; building on these, I contend that such manifestations of cohesiveness bring about actual increases in power which have their own effects and generate their own affective associations and attachments, resulting in further shifts in power. I show that the distinctive effects of human beings' deploying their inadequate ideas can bring about real increases in their power of acting, which would not be available

through adequate ideas alone. Equally, such effects acquire signification through the affective content of both their origins and their own effects. I conclude that Spinoza's *Ethics* gives an understanding of nature and the world of finite modes which is expansive and developmental, rather than reductive and unchanging, and that this provides the basis for an interpretation of his political philosophy in which social entities reflect both their originating ideas and the ways in which they cultivate knowledge.

1. Actions and Interactions

I proposed in Chapter 3 that Spinoza's association between acting and being an adequate cause allows that a mode is taken to act when it is a necessary, albeit not a sufficient, condition of some effect. Thus a mode may be a partial cause, but still act. I argued in Chapter 4 that, for Spinoza, all knowing is necessarily a hybrid of the three kinds of knowledge discussed in *E2p40s2*, such that adequate ideas are present in imaginations and inadequate ideas are ineliminable and indispensable elements of our reasoning and intuition. Here, I seek to establish that modes' inadequate ideas can bring about real increases in their power: that is, that in the case of human beings, we should accept that Spinoza's system allows for the effects of inadequate ideas to be genuinely and even persistently empowering, rather than merely the source of fragile and erratic feelings of empowerment. I survey some influential interpretations of ideas and their power in Spinoza's philosophy, as a basis for developing my proposal that inadequate ideas are necessary for bringing about the distinctively human effects which by which people increase their power; and that cooperation brings about gains in power which are not attributable merely to the formation of aggregations of individuals.

My argument that modes act in virtue of their inadequate ideas as well as their adequate ones, and that inadequate ideas can therefore be genuinely empowering, is a challenge to much Spinoza scholarship. For even if a mode is taken to be genuinely acting in being a necessary condition for some effect of which it is only a partial cause, it may be objected that the mode is still passive insofar as its ideas are inadequate, and that its acting is attributable solely to its

adequate ideas. Some commentators have denied the possibility that inadequate ideas could bring about a real increase in a mode's power (e.g. Wartofsky, 1973), while others have treated the possibility of inadequate ideas constituting a mode's actions as incoherent (e.g. Bennett, 1984). A more recent modification of this strand of interpretation is provided by Lin (2009), who concedes that nothing in *E3d2* excludes an action conditioned by external causes from being considered as an action of some particular mode, but who maintains nonetheless that only a mode's adequate ideas have the capacity to increase its power. He argues that Spinoza's account in the *Ethics* of human beings' ability to increase their own power rests on an optimism about the power of reason, constituted by adequate ideas: "once the seed of reason is planted, there is a natural tendency for its power to grow relative to the power of the passions so that, assuming minimally favourable conditions, reason will eventually come to dominate" (p260). On this reading, the mind's capacity for increasing its power relies solely on its mobilising the intrinsic rationality of its adequate ideas.

By reserving to adequate ideas the possibility of a mode's increasing its power, Lin commits himself to a restrictive interpretation of Spinoza under which no inadequate idea or affect could, properly speaking, contribute to bringing about an increase in power. But it is difficult to reconcile this with Spinoza's exposition of the interplay of action and affect in Part 3 of the *Ethics*. For example, joy is cast as the mind's passage to a greater perfection on encountering the idea of something that aids the body's power of acting (*E3p11s*), suggesting that an idea which is necessarily inadequate in the mode's own mind – one that is partly dependent on encountering another mode – may still result in an actual increase in the mode's power. Further, at *E3p12d* Spinoza explicitly states that the mind imagines in order to increase its power of thinking. A more expansive interpretation of the action requirement at *E3d2* is given by Della Rocca (2003), who associates acting with an individual's striving:

...if – as Spinoza stipulates in 2def3 – an idea is to be an action of the mind, each idea must somehow be bound up with the agent's striving for preservation and enhancement. If a mind does something in virtue of having an idea, that idea and the effects stemming from it must

somehow be a manifestation of the agent's striving...directed to the good of the agent. (2003, p208)

Della Rocca goes on to flesh out this commitment with an account of how ideas may be successful or unsuccessful in bringing about the good of the agent, due to the mind's being determined by a multiplicity of potentially contrary factors. All the ideas a mind forms, in effect, are a manifestation of its power and its striving to persevere in being. They affirm something about its encounters – fallibly, in that they are necessarily inadequate ideas of those encounters, and with no guarantee of success in their affirmations, but nonetheless striving to bring about effects that will increase its power of action and so bring it to a state of greater perfection, or joy. As such, Della Rocca's analysis suggests that inadequate ideas are necessarily involved in actions of the mind.

Despite the recognition that inadequate ideas may be integral to actions, Della Rocca shares with Lin a depiction of modes as acting only on their own account: human beings within Spinoza's philosophy are individual agents whose actions are responses to encounters with other individual agents. A different kind of interpretation is suggested by Armstrong (2017), who proposes that human existence and action, in common with that of other modes, are inextricably relational:

In existence, the active production of those effects that follow from our nature is never a matter of the unimpeded self-expression of essential power, but is instead always a co-production, the result of a special cooperation with external things. (2017, p12)

Armstrong's reading shifts the interpretive focus from the fallible striving of atomised individuals illustrated by Della Rocca to recognition or enactment of commonality among modes, bringing about shared actions which are an expression of their agreement in nature. External forces and a mode's encounters thus have the potential to extend the repertoire of actions of which a mode is capable: rather than an individual mode confronting other modes, relative to which its own striving may or may not win out, modes encounter one another through mutual recognition and production of shared effects. Thus modes act in concert to bring about novel effects which none among them would

be capable of producing alone and which may increase the power of them all. Armstrong argues that this interpretation better reflects Spinoza's argument at *E4pp29-31* that modes can affect each other only if they have something in common and that the kinds of effects they will have on each other depend on the extent of their agreement or disagreement in nature.

The question of whether modes are best understood as individual or relational may be illuminated by considering how inadequate ideas feature in modes' interactions. I argued in Chapter 2 that modes' inadequate ideas should be understood as expressive; here I propose that a mode's inadequate ideas are intrinsic to its acting. Nothing about this question relies on a prior assumption of individuality or relationality in modes' ontological standing: the only specific commitment is that modes can have no intrinsic insight into each other. In this, I respect the stipulations at *E2p19* and *E2p23*, that the mind knows the body and itself only through the body's affections and their ideas. As such, there is nothing essential in modes that could bring it about that their striving tends towards outcomes and effects which will in fact increase their power of acting (on Della Rocca's reading), or which would ensure that they form relations of cooperative striving exclusively with modes with whose nature they are in maximal agreement (on Armstrong's interpretation). Rather, the actions and interactions of modes striving to increase their power always involve engagement with other modes through varying receptivities and perceptions, the sources of Spinoza's first kind of knowledge. As in the case of knowledge, adequate ideas make it the case that modes can act at all; but inadequate ideas are not only intrinsically involved in actions, they are fundamental in determining what modes will do in acting, interacting or collaborating.

Examining this more closely: consider two individual modes, A and B, where B can increase its power by being in the right kind of relation to A. (In Della Rocca's example, A may be a cup of water and B a thirsty person; in Armstrong's, A and B may be two people with a potential shared project from which B will benefit.) In order to realise the increase in power, of course, B must strive to bring about the required relation with A. This principle alone tells us nothing of what is involved in B's striving, yet we can say more about what must

happen between B and A in order for B's power to increase. B must be affected by some effect brought about by A and, on the basis of this affection, must form an idea of A. B's idea of A – whether A is water or another human being – is not only an entirely inadequate conception of A; it is also imbued with affect according to how B perceives¹ the consequences of A's effect for B's own power. If B's inadequate idea of A is affectively positive – B sees A as a cup of refreshing water, or as an agreeable person – then B will act so as to form the relation with A that brings about the increase in power. If B's inadequate idea of A has a negative effect on B's power of acting, however – say, B suspects that A is a cup of poison, rather than of water, or B has the impression that A is hostile to her – then B will avoid A and will not realise the increase in power that could have resulted. Either way, B's inadequate idea of A is the deciding factor: B's power of acting is increased, if it is, in virtue of B's exercise of her *inadequate* ideas, not in virtue of an extension or enhancement of her adequate ideas.

It might be objected that we should be able to say that B has a more adequate idea of A in the good case, where B's power of acting is increased through achieving the right relation with A, than in the bad case, where B's inadequate idea of A excludes such a relation. Perhaps one might argue that in the good case B intuitively knows whatever it is about A that has the potential to increase B's power. But Spinoza's epistemology does not permit this move. For even if A's aptness to benefit B were a fact in advance of the set of actions that brought about the relation between A and B by which B's power is increased, there are significant barriers to B knowing this fact purely as a matter of intuition. Spinoza's concept of *scientia intuitiva* consists only in adequate ideas (*E2p40s2*) and existent modes do not have adequate ideas about each other through encounters such as that described above, either as individuals (*E2p25*) or as members of a group or class (*E2p40s1*). A mode might have an adequate idea of what relations of likeness consist in, or of all things being expressions of a single

¹ I use 'perceive' here in the sense that Spinoza uses it in *E2p12*, "Whatever happens in the object of the idea constituting the human mind must be perceived by the human mind...". In other words, there is no implication of consciousness or awareness involved in this perception: the 'perception' is really just a fact of the matter about whether B's power of acting is increased or decreased by the encounter with A.

substance and sharing attributes²; but even then, it is not clear that those ideas would confer on a mode the ability to increase its power *through forming the right kinds of relations with other existent modes*. The most one can say is that such adequate ideas may increase the mode's propensity to perceive the productive potential in encounters with other modes, and so – given the right kinds of encounters – to be more capable of forming the inadequate ideas of other modes which would be successful rather than unsuccessful in bringing about empowering relations. Similarly, while Spinoza argues that modes which share bodily similarities with a greater range of other modes are able to perceive more things adequately (E2p39c), there is no suggestion that they are able to do so simply by examining the adequate ideas that they already have. On the contrary, sharing bodily similarities can extend a mode's ability to perceive adequately only through making available an extended range of potential encounters with other modes and thus opportunities to form inadequate ideas of other modes. As I argued in Chapter 4, in order for an existent mode to extend the range and scope of its adequate ideas as proposition E2p39c implies, it is necessary for it to engage with other existent modes; here, I have shown that Spinoza's account of mind entails that such engagement can occur only in virtue of and through the medium of the mode's inadequate ideas. Once it has formed these inadequate ideas, it may exercise the epistemic virtues explored in section 4 of Chapter 5 so as to evaluate the extent to which they involve a privation of knowledge; but in the absence of forming such ideas, a mode has no basis for extending its knowing at all. Thus increases in a mode's power of acting are always dependent on its experiencing the right kinds of encounters with other modes and being receptive in the right kinds of way to form the *inadequate* ideas which create the conditions under which the increase in power available from that encounter may be realised. I expand on this proposal in the next section.

2. Inadequate Ideas and Actions

The exploration above of modes' power to act provides the basis for a deeper appreciation of the role of inadequate ideas in enhancing modes' power, as a

² I am not claiming that these are in fact adequate ideas, in Spinoza's use or any other, only that they are the kinds of ideas that are better candidates for being known adequately.

precursor to examining how this plays out to underpin Spinoza's political philosophy. In Chapter 2, I argued that modes' inadequate ideas are required for them to bring about the transformative effects that are distinctive of them and provide the basis for their identity and individuation. In Chapter 4, I drew attention to the ubiquity of adequate ideas, in that Spinoza holds that any mode has adequate ideas in virtue of its constitution. I argued that just as adequate ideas do not provide the basis for differentiation among modes, so they do not offer a means of modes knowing each other better. Here I build on those conclusions to show how inadequate ideas are the vehicle for our efforts to increase our power through knowledge of the world. That is, we are able to increase our power by acting in engagement with other modes through our inadequate ideas, rather than our adequate ideas. Inadequate ideas are the means by which we bring about transformative effects which create new realities, to open up further possibilities for empowerment.

Having the adequate ideas we do is fundamental to our striving to persist in being, but what is required in order to enhance or increase our power of acting is to undergo encounters in which we are affected by other modes (*E4p18s*). I demonstrated in Chapter 2 that this is true for the most basic requirements of our existence as living organisms – breathing, eating and so forth; now I extend that argument to the most sophisticated and resonant expressions of human creativity. I shall argue that we increase our power by acting as the existent modes we are: that is, by forming and revising our ideas and making corresponding physical movements, according to the actions we are able to perform given the bodily affections we undergo and the corresponding modifications of our minds. Further, as I argued in developing the hybrid knowing thesis, while we certainly act through, or in virtue of, our adequate ideas, it is not clear that we can claim reflective understanding or adequate knowledge of them. Indeed, Spinoza's definition of adequate ideas suggests that we have no reflective or conceptual means of recognising the adequacy of the ideas we have:

By adequate idea I understand an idea which, insofar as it is considered in itself, without relation to an object, has all the properties, or intrinsic denominations, of a true idea. (*E2d4*)

The definition above may be glossed as an identification of adequate ideas with necessary truths; but this is of little or no help in explicating our actions as existent modes striving to persevere through our relations with other modes. First, as finite minds we form ideas only in our encounters with other modes; there is no provision in Spinoza's philosophy of mind for us to form ideas other than in relation to our inadequate ideas of affections of the body, and as such we are poorly placed to refine and enhance our power of acting by isolating or distilling adequate ideas from inadequate ones. Second, as I argued in Chapter 4, Spinoza's account of knowledge entails that any conceptual expression of those necessary truths will require the use of signs, and as such will have an element of imagination, that is, will not be an unadulterated expression of the adequate idea it describes. Obviously, this does not mean that, in attempting its expression, we thereby lose the very adequate idea that we possess and attempt to express; but the elusiveness of what it means for us to access adequate ideas suggests that mobilising them intentionally or reflectively in attempts to increase our power of acting is a more complex matter than we might assume to. Third, as I showed in Chapter 5, such attempts will be imbued with affective content and tacit epistemic commitments, which are liable to compromise our best efforts to articulate our adequate ideas.

If we cannot choose to act through our adequate ideas alone, in the same way that we cannot choose to deliberate with adequate ideas alone, it might seem equally problematic to interpret Spinoza as holding that our inadequate ideas make a genuine and positive contribution to our acting, through which we can realise genuine increases in our power of acting. After all, while Spinoza argues that inadequate ideas are distinguished from adequate ones only by involving a privation of knowledge (*E2p35*), in the same proposition he describes such ideas as "mutilated and confused". Further, he suggests that inadequate ideas tend to follow from inadequate ideas (*E2p36*). Reservations about inadequate ideas having a positive role in actions are reinforced by the

association between inadequate ideas and imagination, both imbued with affects in respect of which we are passive. However, it is notable that Spinoza does not distinguish between adequate and inadequate ideas as sources of the mind's passing to a greater perfection (*E3p11s*). On the basis of the hybrid knowing thesis elaborated in Chapter 4 and of Spinoza's caveat that our minds' perfection would not increase in isolation (*E4p73*; *E4AppXIII*), I shall proceed on the basis that there is no need to interpret Spinoza as suggesting that human beings (and other modes) might best seek to increase their power by attempting to generate adequate ideas in isolation from the inadequate ideas generated in encounters with other modes. Rather, I shall argue that a greater insight into Spinoza's philosophy may be gained by consideration of the part played by inadequate ideas as a necessary element in the actions by which human beings increase their individual or collective power.

Spinoza's warning at *E2p36* that inadequate ideas follow from each other by the same necessity as adequate ideas should not be seen as a negative evaluation of inadequate ideas, their content or their potential to increase our power. Certainly, the fact that inadequate ideas follow of necessity from other inadequate ideas entails that thinking or reasoning from inadequate ideas risks perpetuating or even magnifying the privation of knowledge involved in them. But the proposition can be read as a psychological claim, rather than a straightforwardly logical one: a claim that seeks to capture something about our thinking or reasoning processes, rather than a claim about the self-reinforcing nature of ideas taken as self-standing modes. Then, the thought that inadequate ideas follow from each other of necessity may be understood, not as an appeal to some intrinsic problem with inadequate ideas, but as a reminder that our inadequate ideas have power within our minds. I argued in Chapter 5 that if someone forms an idea, even an idea that is inadequate in relation to its object, she has acted in Spinoza's formal sense of the word, and the joy involved in acting gives her an affective attachment to the idea she has formed. In other words, we are disposed to be infatuated with our own joyful ideas, however inadequate they may be; and therefore to cling to the inadequate ideas we have formed such that they are less easily 'excluded' than they may warrant. Reading

E2p36 as a logical claim may suggest that the inadequacy of ideas creates a kind of vicious circle of thought, in which their inadequacy is inexorably reinforced and exacerbated, sapping our power of acting. Reading it instead as a psychological claim draws our attention to the fact that such circles are the result, not of the inadequacy in our ideas, but of the affective attachment and investment we bring to the process and outcomes of our own thinking. Further, the ineliminable presence of imagination in our reasoning and knowing as human beings means that we cannot appeal to Spinoza's characterisation of reason itself as consisting in only adequate ideas to claim that some subset of our ideas or some domain of thought is immune from this potentially detrimental affective attachment. However well we reason, our joy at our own achievement in doing so risks concealing from us the fact that our thinking contains errors or lacks salient information or coherence. We may mitigate the systematic error involved in our affective knowing, by forming a clear and distinct idea of the joyful affect associated with reason, but this will not eliminate the affect.

Inadequate ideas, then, are always present in our acting and in our efforts to increase our power of acting; as argued in section 1 of this chapter, in the absence of inadequate ideas, our adequate ideas will at best sustain, rather than increase our power of acting. Therefore, inadequate ideas both are necessarily involved in our attempts to enhance our power and, in the instances where we are successful in doing so, are the source of the increase in power. In other words, our inadequate ideas give us capacities which our adequate ideas do not, that is, capacities for extending our powers of acting and striving. Just as we have the effects that are distinctive of us as human beings in virtue of the inadequate ideas we form of our encounters with other modes, so our inadequate ideas provide the means of consolidating and increasing our power to persevere in being. The implications of this claim are explored further in the next section.

3. What Empowerment Involves

While I have argued that the inadequate ideas we are able to form enable us to make genuine increases in our power of acting, that is in no way to deny that our ability to do so is both fallible and fragile, subject both to the (mostly

unacknowledged) privation of knowledge involved in inadequate ideas and to fluctuations in our attachment to them in the face of the encounters through which we form other, competing inadequate ideas and attachments. Indeed, Spinoza makes clear both in the *Ethics* (E4pp33-35) and in his political philosophy (TTP4[6] TP2.13-14) that inadequate ideas and their affective content tend to disempower rather than to empower, since even joyful affect will be unstable if arising from inadequate ideas. We increase our power best when we act according to the guidance of reason (E4p35), that is, when we recognise and act on the similarities that exist between ourselves and other people or things. But the guidance of reason does not preclude the use of imagination and inadequate ideas; indeed, without these, the guidance of reason will not bring about increases in our power.

A person might increase her power, for example, by forming and enacting the idea that some things in the world around her would be good for protection and building herself a shelter. It is possible for her to form this idea just because of the real commonalities – the adequate ideas – expressed by herself and other bodies in their existence; but in order to build a physical shelter she also needs to imagine how it may be structured and maintained to offer the protection she seeks. In other words, the existence of the real common properties is a necessary condition of any shelter, but it is not sufficient to show how a shelter may be built: for that, the person's *inadequate* ideas of other modes which she encounters are required³. In the domain of sociability people increase their power by joining forces with other people (E4p35; TTP16[13-25]; TP13). All such actions of joining forces rely on adequate ideas: first, in the idea of oneself existing in relation to others; second, in that Spinoza casts such joining of forces as an exercise of reason; and finally, because people are able to form the idea of joining forces with other people through a recognition of something genuinely in common, as I proposed in Chapter 4. But they also involve inadequate ideas – imaginations of shared goals, of what relations with other people are possible, of what lesser danger looks like or what empowering project may be realised. In

³ Similarly, having an fully adequate conceptualised idea – if such were possible – of the laws of physics or of compositionality would not be sufficient for her to bring such a shelter into being.

joining forces, people bring about some new way of being, or finding their way in the world, which manifests both the adequate and inadequate ideas involved in its inception. As with the shelter, people could not join forces at all in the absence of real similarities – agreement in nature – between them; but the extent and productivity of the cooperation they actually achieve will depend on what inadequate ideas they form of themselves and of each other, including their preconceptions about how desirable it is to cooperate and what may be achieved through doing so. Our ability as existent modes to increase our power depends on our being able to bring about effects through our inadequate ideas: devising empowering structures, formations, alliances and so forth, made possible by what we really do have in common with other modes, but deriving their form and effects from our imaginative elaboration of such commonality.

As human beings, our inadequate ideas go beyond mere affective perceptions of the world and our situation within it. When we act according to the guidance of reason to overcome the passions which drive us apart (*E4p35*) and so achieve a state of increased power through collaboration and cooperation, our joy at this increased power leads us to consolidate it through institutions, rituals and fictions. Thus we create not only new entities but also inadequate ideas of those entities and our relation to them, to preserve the power we have gained. In the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* Spinoza spells out the human origins and practical nature of laws and religious ceremonies: this deflationary account of purportedly sacred practices highlights the importance of such institutions for binding people together, even as it offers a stringent critique of their pretensions to necessity and divine origin:

Moses...introduced religion into the Body politic, so that the people would do their duty not so much from fear as from devotion. And next he placed them under obligation with benefits, and in the name of God promised them many things in the future. (*TTP5*[29])

Spinoza makes it clear why the fictions of Moses were genuinely empowering for the ancient Hebrews, even as he just as clearly rejects the thought that they would be empowering for his Dutch contemporaries. The tension between the reality of the power engendered by means of inadequate ideas and the fact that

such power is nonetheless provisional, even disposable, is at the heart of Spinoza's political philosophy. This theme will be explored in greater depth in the final chapter; for now, I emphasise the intrinsic creativity of Spinoza's account of how fictions operate in the generation and continuation of new social formations and ways of life. Through their inadequate ideas of each other and of other things, both animate and inanimate, people bring into being new entities: actual communities, friendships, nations and other shared projects which acquire their own momentum. Like the inadequate ideas involved in biological processes, these conceptual inadequate ideas have transformative effects: they change the way things stand in the world. In other words, there is a fact of the matter about the effects of our inadequate ideas: they transcend the inadequacy of their origins by bringing new realities into being. People living within this new reality, of course, will not perceive it adequately: rather, they will form their own inadequate ideas of it. Nonetheless, such a shared project may really empower people living according to it.

Inasmuch as a social entity is genuinely empowering, people within it will form joyful ideas of it which will, in turn, sustain its existence. However, whether it is genuinely empowering or not, its very existence makes possible the conception of new inadequate ideas in the form of fictions which sustain and support its existence. Some of these new inadequate ideas will also bring about new modes – institutions or customs which seek to consolidate and perpetuate the greater power derived from the actualisation of the inadequate ideas which underpinned the original shared project – which in turn will have the effect of stimulating inadequate ideas and associated affects in people. There is therefore a complex dynamic working out in Spinoza's understanding of sociability, under which the generation of entities which increase our power through inadequate ideas also brings about new realities, new ways of perceiving or imagining and further attempts to increase our power. Of course, nothing in this dynamic guarantees that power will increase: on the contrary, if sustaining fictions lose their credibility, or institutions fail in their purposes, whatever empowerment they achieved will be undermined.

At least since the publication of Gatens and Lloyd's *Collective Imaginings* (1999), there has developed a substantial body of literature dealing with the role of fictions and exemplars in Spinoza's philosophical writing. James (2010) draws attention to Spinoza's treatment of the intrinsically fragile nature of social and religious fictions grounded in imagination: laws which once were liberating may subsequently be experienced as limiting or oppressive, while even the advantages of an ideally rational social formation require an appeal to imagination in order for people to appreciate its merits (pp262-267). Gatens (2009a) argues that philosophically imagined exemplars contained in the *Ethics*, such as those of the wise and free person (*E4pp63-67*) and the counterfactual community of reason suggested at *E4p18s* differ from the exemplars of theologians or politicians in that they deploy the imagination and the power of imitation rationally, "in a self-aware and disciplined manner", such that "one knows that the ideal is a fictional device, a mode of thought, that is put to work in the service of the human endeavour to persevere in existence" (pp467-468). Rosenthal (1997) shows vividly how Spinoza recounts the story of the ancient Hebrews in such a way as to demonstrate how once-empowering fictions deteriorated into superstitions which undermined the very laws and institutions which brought about empowerment (p227-229). As these interpretations propose, fictions may be used to show people different possible models of sociability, to explain what a good life looks like for individuals or communities, to give people reasons for following particular laws or ways of living, to conjure up potential rewards or threats and so forth. Spinoza deploys the language and tools of fiction – presumably in a 'self-aware and disciplined manner' – both to elucidate the message of his philosophy and to articulate lessons drawn from historical, Scriptural and indeed philosophical sources.

The common thread through these interpretations of Spinoza is that fictions, being grounded in inadequate ideas, are not only intrinsically unreliable or fragile in themselves, but also bring about only fragile, unstable ways of living, which are liable to disruption because they are unable to generate the reasoned confidence and support that would be necessary for institutions to endure indefinitely. However, history shows that the societies and institutions which

Spinoza holds to be generated through imaginations often prove remarkably resilient. I propose that my reading of Spinoza's dynamic of sociability as reifying its own transformational effects shows that the argument that fictions bring about essentially fragile and transient states of affairs is only a partial treatment of how inadequate ideas contribute to Spinoza's political philosophy. The resilience of social formations should alert us to the genuinely transformative potential and effects of inadequate ideas and fictions. When fictions are used to generate social ways of living, they transform how things stand in the world: they bring about connections, social orders and institutions which did not previously exist. Fictions give rise to new social orders, institutions and shared ways of living which are not themselves fictions, but have real existence, realised through human actions – they are transformative effects of a kind that is distinctive of human beings. We bring about new realities without having adequate ideas of either those realities or the actual commonalities which make them possible, but that does not necessarily impede them from being genuinely empowering.

When people share a way of life, this fact of the matter is shared as well as whatever fictions may have brought it about or may sustain it. The basic fact of a shared way of life is a demonstration of an agreement in nature among human beings which does not extend to other modes, even though human beings are necessarily part of nature. Whatever our similarities with non-human elements in nature, human beings cannot make common cause with rocks, or cultivate communities with cats or chimpanzees. Mutual recognition among people as beings which generate similar effects builds an *adequate* element into our attempts at empowerment and our binding fictions, in the sense suggested in *E2p40s1*: an underlying grasp or manifestation of some real agreement in nature. Such recognition is then enacted through reasonings and imaginings, fallibly seeking to bring about the promised empowerment.

The consequence is that existent social formations, even though grounded in fiction, both enact real similarities or agreement in nature among people and cultivate new ones. A shared way of life gives rise to shared practices, customs, habits and preferences which may entail having shared beliefs but need not do

so. Participation in such shared practices stabilises recognition among people – it enables them to identify and codify agreement in nature by enacting similarity. At the same time, it generates affective attachment to such practices and the people who engage in them; and affective aversion to those who do not. The imaginative process of bringing about social formations grounded in the needs and affinities that people originally recognised in each other has the effect of creating further affinities. These affinities are real similarities, which extend beyond those originally recognised. The enactment of similarity itself therefore has transformational effects – it brings about a new state of affairs in the world, an object, as it were, of which an adequate idea exists in the mind of God. Traces of the fictional aspect of enacting similarity, its origin in inadequate ideas, remain embedded in the adequate idea of this object: understanding the fictions that brought it into being, and that they are indeed fictions, is part of knowing it adequately.

In the good case, the ways in which we enact recognition increase our ability to be affected in joyful ways: that is, they make us more open to recognition of what really does empower us, including similarities and mutual affinities that we have not yet perceived. But there is also an inescapable tension in such shared projects. The fictions and other inadequate ideas involved in our enacting and consolidating recognition have the result that the extended similarities we create may have results that are in fact contrary to our own empowerment. The converse of our affective attachment to our practices and those who share them is an affective aversion or hostility to other practices and peoples; this itself restricts our openness to being affected in joyful ways by encounters with people who are different from us, and this restriction has disempowering consequences which we cannot perceive. Our route to empowerment through elaborating recognition also contains inbuilt limitations: in reifying some particular set of human needs and desires, and in giving priority or status to those who affirm those needs and desires, any social formation ignores or de-emphasises other needs, desires and indeed people.

The interpretations of Spinoza which characterise social institutions based within fictions as necessarily fragile and unstable, therefore, only partly capture

Spinoza's treatment of how political life is shaped by inadequate ideas. The richness of Spinoza's political philosophy lies in the dynamics of interaction between, on the one hand, our recognition of affinity with and potential for empowerment through other human beings and, on the other, the limitations inherent in our efforts to realise that. Like the building of a shelter, the creation of social organisations is made possible by adequate ideas but can only be conceived and executed in terms of inadequate ideas, and inadequacy entails limitation and specificity. In consequence, even fictions and societies which result from a deployment of imagination in the most rational and self-aware manner could not be the last word in human empowerment. Like a shelter, a social organisation grants to those within it the potential for developing ways of life not necessarily envisaged by or even conceivable to its originators: ways of life which, as it were, press at the boundaries of that social organisation. This is the intrinsic nature of the transformative effects – fictions, artefacts, sociabilities – that follow from a distinctively human creativity.

4. Empowerment and Creative Effects

I argued in Chapter 2 that modes are distinguished from each other by the effects they bring about, and in Chapter 3 that the effects of modes' actions are distinguished to the extent that their capacities for being affected are distinct. The recognisability of modes' effects is therefore underpinned by the inadequate ideas that are characteristic of them. In arguing here that social formations grounded in and enacting inadequate ideas are transformative effects of human creativity, therefore, I am not claiming that creativity is unique to human beings; only that the creativity which brings about distinctively human sociability is unique to them. The claim is particular rather than general: whether some effect is distinctively human depends on the fact of the matter. Some creative social practices are recognisably common to human beings and other modes or species – for example, making shelters, living in shared spaces, feeding each other, grooming – while others perhaps are not – for example, agriculture, universities, slavery. My concern here is not to attempt to carve out a distinctive domain of human creativity, but to elucidate the implications for human beings of their

potential for empowerment through transformative effects generated from inadequate ideas.

I defined transformative effects as those which change how things stand in the world: an action which produces a transformative effect thus brings about a change in how things stand in the world. An effect may be transformative without being innovative: as I argued in Chapter 2, continuous biological processes such as respiration, digestion, photosynthesis and the secretion of hormones may all be understood as transformative. Some transformative effects, however, are innovative: they create new states of affairs or new entities. In bringing about transformative effects, a mode must be said to act, for the effects would not come about without it, that is, without that particular mode; but the effects it produces cannot be understood through itself alone, because they are not effects it could produce without being affected by other modes. One consequence of a mode's being only a partial cause of its transformative effects is that the mode itself can form only inadequate ideas of those effects. Similarly, transformative effects may be produced by modes acting together, but each of them can form only inadequate ideas of those effects.

Human social practices and institutions are a good example of such effects and the inadequate ideas they prompt us to form. In initiating a social practice or institution, a group of human beings produces something whose reality extends beyond any of their understandings, and this is so regardless of whether the practice is brought about democratically or autocratically, or of how extensively codified or rigorously policed it is. Further, the very exercise of that social practice ensures that its enacted reality exceeds the effect of the actions that bring it about. This is partly because living within a new social practice will bring people together in new ways, impose new obligations on them and open up new possibilities for them, thus extending their repertoire of affect: prompting joyful affects to the extent that they are empowered by the practice, sad affects to the extent that it lessens their power. Any explanatory or legitimating fictions associated with the practice will similarly influence their affective states and dispositions. And, since social practices generate specific forms of behaviour,

they also bring about changes in people's affective responses to each other, both within the practice and outside it.

It should be clear that this is not a static state of affairs. For as new possibilities open up and are acted upon, new realities come about which themselves may generate new affective responses and new shared fictions. People's various experiences of the social practice in question may generate mechanisms of contrariety – that is, affirmation and negation of ideas – which consolidate or undermine it over time. Enacting the practice – affirming it – will tend to sustain it by reinforcing its positive affective associations, however inadequate the ideas on which it is founded. Nonetheless, challenges to the practice – ideas that are contrary to it – may emerge when people understand themselves as limited or indeed oppressed by the practice. In this sense, it is true to say that social formations founded on imagination, whether practices or institutions, have instability built into them. However, on this picture, the inherent instability of a practice or institution is not necessarily the seed of its destruction, but may be a source of its adaptation, development and elaboration. As in the case of fictions, there is no guarantee that such adaptations, developments or elaborations will enhance the power of those enacting or subject to the practice, or indeed that of the practice itself. They will, however, bring about some changed state of affairs – some new reality which in turn will prompt affective responses, legitimating or resisting fictions and so forth. The dynamic evoked earlier in this chapter in the case of fictions is equally present in the reality and enactment of social formations. Social formations develop recursively, with existing rules and norms shaping how both conformity with them and critique of or resistance to them is manifested. Where social formations succeed in adapting to change, they also develop expansively, extending the repertoire of increased power realised by people within them. This theme and its implications for how we should interpret Spinoza's political philosophy will be explored in more detail in the final chapter.

Spinoza's philosophy, I suggest, presses us to understand political bodies and ideas as transformative effects: as outcomes of complex processes involving actions, reactions and interactions. They are distinctively human transformative

effects; more significantly, they are distinctively human effects to which we respond in particular ways. In effect, they have a special meaning or signification for us. As elaborated in Chapter 5, Spinoza explains our recognition and understanding of signification in terms of our epistemic and affective past, which shapes our responses and the affective associations we bring to changed circumstances. The consequence of this is that overt attempts to shape or change social and political formations, whether through discussion, propaganda or brute force, are at best uncertain ventures. James (2012) proposes that Spinoza's analysis of accounts of the prophets to be found in Scripture shows the importance of signs in securing uptake of both their prophecies and indeed their prophetic status. The significance is that signs, unlike insights and ideas, are public, and can therefore be shared and recognised by a wide audience, provided only that they resonate with people's existing understanding of things. For an understanding or a meaning to be shared does not mean that it has any special epistemic status in terms of adequacy or truth, but shared meanings are likely to have particular persistence in people's minds through being confirmed and thus reinforced through successive reiterations. Further, even though signs and other shared imaginative concepts have largely inadequate content, the fact of their being widely and consistently affirmed in a particular way may give them a special status: in effect, they may become reified and consolidated in much the same way as social formations and, also like these, may thereby acquire magnified authority or force. Finally, and also like social formations, the signification of concepts or signs is inextricably bound up with the experiences and affective states of those who use them. To demonstrate this, I conclude this chapter with a reconstruction of Spinoza's treatment of the concept of freedom in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*.

5. Freedom Situated, Expressive and Expansive

Spinoza's philosophy is best characterised as a philosophy of freedom. The *Ethics* contrasts human freedom with human bondage and shows the way to freedom; the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* affirms that the purpose of the state is freedom and can be read as a critique of socio-political norms through the opposed concepts of freedom and servitude; the *Tractatus Politicus* variously

invokes free multitudes, councils and commonwealths to illustrate political virtue and advantage. In appealing to freedom, Spinoza clearly intends to prompt a favourable response in his readers (and takes care to reinforce the desirability of freedom in his writing), and yet also challenges some of their received understandings of freedom, for example by rejecting freedom of will (*E2p49s*; *TP2.7*) and by arguing that true freedom is to be found only by living within a state and in obedience to its laws (*E4p73*).

Spinoza takes care to contextualise freedom for his readers. The freedom attainable by human beings is contrasted with the freedom of God; freedom in a state is conceptualised as freedom within laws, rather than the laws being seen as a constraint on freedom. In a lengthy disquisition on the history of the Hebrew state as depicted in Scripture, he describes the freedom of the ancient Hebrews as consisting in making their own laws as a people and then owing complete obedience to the restrictions embodied in those laws (*TTP17*[88-92]). In effect, he situates the concept of freedom as arising from and being shaped by the affective experiences of people desirous of freedom, rather than as a quasi-Platonic ideal to which human experience must aspire. And in his account of the scriptural heredity of the concept of freedom, he suggests that it carries with it both negative and positive dimensions: being freed from some present external constraint, on the one hand, and realising freedom through adopting some specific way of life, on the other.

In other words, freedom belongs to whoever claims it and actualises it in their mode of living, either individually or collectively. Freedom and obedience are not contrary to one another; rather, a mode of living which is liberating and empowering involves adherence to norms which structure that liberation and empowerment. The requirement for freedom will be experienced primarily by those who feel unfree in relation to such norms, and will be imagined in relation to their feelings of unfreedom. This means that the concept of human freedom is not eternal, a given of reason, but imaginative, and thus contingent and contextualised. Once actualised, specific examples of freedom may be investigated, as Spinoza investigates the Hebrews' freedom, and this process may reveal both differences in understandings of the concept – as indicated in

section 3 of this chapter, Spinoza clearly intends to prompt his Dutch contemporaries to contrast the account of the Hebrews' freedom with their republican and mercantile aspirations – and the existence of privations in particular attempts to instantiate freedom. Spinoza is not a relativist about freedom: there is indeed a fact of the matter about whether or not some particular social formation enacts freedom in the ways of life it makes available. However, he is a particularist: freedom, being partly constituted by people's affective experiences of those ways of life, can be judged only in the context of how and why freedom is conceptualised and recognised in that social formation. Through investigation – through compiling a natural history, in Spinoza's terms – a social formation's conception of freedom may be interrogated and better understood. This process will reveal not only its requirements and rationale, but also privations associated with the inadequacy of its origins, allowing it to be revised creatively, to be a renewed source of liberation and empowerment.

Spinoza's free man does everything he can to exercise reason, that is, to understand his circumstances, in a context of engagement with others rather than in isolation. The purpose of the state is freedom in that any social formation is intrinsically a situation of greater power for the people within it than they would be in a position to realise alone. In realising the freedoms available through social formations, people also live under constraints and laws which may themselves come to be perceived as compromising freedom. The laws and institutions of a state may therefore generate affective responses which show them to be at variance with freedom, without thereby compromising its purpose; further, *qua* effects traceable to human actions and inadequate ideas, those laws and institutions are available for critique and change. Cohesiveness within the state requires neither consent nor acquiescence in shared fictions, but (partial, variable) participation in the ways of life associated with them, the limits of which are contestable and therefore revisable in people's actions. And while the affective impact of living among people who do not fully agree in nature may not be wholly joyful, it is a necessary part of the project of creating and recreating human freedom. The free man is not one who has escaped the bondage of the passions, but one who is able to rationalise his own passions and those of others,

in the endeavour to understand and enhance human life. Freedom is a manifestation of human beings' expression, acting through inadequate ideas; therefore it is dynamic and expansive. The final chapter explores this aspect of Spinoza's political philosophy more fully.

Chapter 7

Knowing as the Dynamic of the Political

I showed in the previous chapter how my reading of Spinoza's epistemology as a theory of affective knowing provides the basis for an interpretation of his political philosophy as intrinsically creative, by showing that human beings within his system are able to go beyond merely perceiving agreement in nature, by acting to bring about transformative effects: that is, to create new commonalities which, originating in imagination, nonetheless bring about new realities – ways of living which were not available prior to their institution. In this chapter I draw together the underlying themes of my reading of Spinoza's theory of knowledge – expression, affect and inadequate ideas – to show how this characterisation of creativity can shed new light on Spinoza's political writings, demonstrating that tensions which are often seen as problematic or even incoherent are in fact a source of dynamism and innovation in human social life. Interpretations of Spinoza which seek either to identify these tensions as a weakness in his philosophy or to resolve them miss their mark: the presence of contrary ideas and orientations in the texts reflects Spinoza's understanding of how political life unfolds and why it can be said to be the locus and source of human freedom.

In Chapter 2, I argued for an extension of Deleuze's expressionist interpretation of Spinoza, such that both adequate and inadequate ideas can be said to exercise power in virtue of their active expression of substance, that is, of the power of God or Nature. One consequence of this reading is that modes may be best understood as differentiated by the range and kind of the effects they bring about in expression, rather than by an internalist concept of essence. The involvement of inadequate ideas in expression as well as in affective response means that understanding modes as differentiated individuals also means understanding them through their relations with other modes. Further, the involvement of inadequate ideas in expression makes it possible to account for

modes having transformational effects of different kinds. In Chapter 3, I considered Spinoza's distinctive treatment of affect as both active and passive, involving a mode's active responses to affections brought about in encounters with other modes. Spinoza's affects are a source of human bondage not because they prevent or inhibit activity and the expression of substance, but because they reveal the very fact of our humanity, of what distinguishes human beings from other modes. On the one hand, affects drive people apart, due to their origin in inadequate ideas that are different for each individual; on the other, the very fact that human beings are able to form and recognise similar ideas, and indeed to cultivate shared affects, shows their affinity with each other and their difference from other kinds of modes. Affects thus underlie both divergence and cohesion in human social formations. I argued in Chapter 4 that Spinoza's epistemology and philosophy of mind entail that all articulated, that is, expressed human knowledge comprises a hybrid of imagination and reason and, as such, involves both inadequate and adequate ideas with corresponding affective force. The implication of this is that inadequate ideas are essential both to human beings bringing about effects that are distinctive of them – including effects such as social institutions, rules and customs – and to their affective attachment to such effects through the attribution of significance and meaning.

The rest of this chapter addresses how this interplay of expression, affect and inadequate ideas can be deployed to defuse the purported tensions in Spinoza's political philosophy. First, I show that my interpretation of Spinoza's philosophy gives a strong basis for understanding a state, or indeed any human social formation, as a complex individual mode: an effect of the inadequate ideas and interactions of multiple modes. Indeed, it is a specific instance of the human creativity explicated in Chapter 6, where new individual modes are brought into being through the imaginative repertoire of people. I go on to demonstrate the implications of this reading, arguing that states *qua* modes are subject to affective encounters with modes both external and internal to them; in this way we can see that a state, like any complex mode, is continuously re-created by its constituent modes and their interactions. I explore how the reciprocal affective responses of a state and its people play out so as to increase or decrease their

power; in doing so, I elucidate the systemic grounds for Spinoza's insistence that oppressive states are weak states and suggest that this makes sense of Spinoza's picture of the state as both absolute and fragile, relying on both reason and affect. The requirements of exercising absolute sovereignty are such that, in the best case, the state must be adaptable and open; but the best case is never guaranteed. I illustrate the advantages of my reading relative to other recent interpretations which also appeal to constitution and institution to explicate the political texts, and show that Spinoza's political philosophy generates a genuine normativity for politics without recourse to a narrative of governmental legitimacy.

1. The State as Existent Mode

As outlined in Chapter 1, the ontological standing of the state in Spinoza's political writings is the subject of significant interpretive debate. The tendency of liberal commentators has been to grant ontological priority to individual human beings, while others take a more collectivist view, characterising the state as an individual which, in bringing together the power of those who make it up, exercises a power greater than any of them individually. Here I show that there are good grounds within Spinoza's philosophy for taking the latter view, to the extent that the state must be regarded as an individual mode and, in actualising agreements in nature among people, must exceed any person in its power. However, I argue that having ontological standing *qua* mode confers no ontological or ethical priority on the state. In the succeeding sections of this chapter I elaborate the interpretive advantages of my approach, and argue that these are sufficient to overcome objections to it.

The sketch on the nature of bodies following *E2p13* makes it explicit that compound bodies may be composed of numerous individual bodies which differ from each other, and yet which constitute a single individual just as far as they retain the same ratio of motion and rest. Further, such complex composite individuals show greater resilience, the greater the diversity of their constitution:

So far we have conceived an individual which is composed only of bodies which are distinguished from one another only by motion and rest, speed and slowness, that is, which is composed of the simplest bodies. But if we should now conceive of another, composed of a number of individuals of a different nature, we shall find that it can be affected in a great many other ways, and still preserve its nature. (E2p13sL7d)

Whilst in the case of a state or any other social formation it is hard to think of a multitude of people bringing about a contiguous body¹, there are still good reasons to think that their combination does form some new individual entity. In Part 4 of the *Ethics*, Spinoza builds on the principles of physical composition to offer a thesis of combining power:

There are, then, many things outside ourselves, which are useful to us, and are, therefore, to be desired. Of such none can be discerned more excellent, than those which are in entire agreement with our nature. For if, for example, two individuals of entirely the same nature are united, they form a combination twice as powerful as either of them singly. (E4p18s)

Here, Spinoza moves from a physical criterion for composition, that of having the same ratio of motion and rest, to speak of composition in terms of agreement in nature. Individuals which agree in nature are able to create groups which combine their power. So when two individuals of entirely the same nature join forces, they form an entity which has double the power of either one. However, neither of those individuals has that doubled power in itself: it is the combined entity, even though composed of both individuals, which holds and is able to exercise the aggregated power, even as each constituent individual retains its own power. As Spinoza explains in distinguishing his philosophy from that of Hobbes:

[T]he difference between Hobbes and myself...consists in this, that I always preserve the natural right in its entirety...I hold that the

¹ Although, according to Spinoza, nobody has determined what bodies can do, whether in themselves or if determined by the mind (E3p2s); so it would be overstating the case to dismiss that possibility entirely. However, my argument for the state *qua* mode does not rest on this.

sovereign power in a State has right over a subject only in proportion to the excess of its power over that of a subject. (*Ep50*)

In other words, people combining their resources within a state retain their individuality and power, while the state has its own power, derived from its constituent people but distinct from that of any individual person. This is further confirmed in the *Tractatus Politicus*:

This right, which is defined by the power of a people (*potentia multitudinis*), is usually called sovereignty, and is possessed absolutely by whoever has charge of affairs of state. (*TP2*[17])

In other words, the power of the state as a composite entity must be exercised in a unified manner, and as such is separate from the power each of its constituent people possesses. As an entity, the state has *potentia*; the fact that this power derives from the *potentia* of its constituent people does not compromise its reality or make it attributable to them rather than it, any more than an individual human being's *potentia* is called into question by the fact that their body is made up of many cells, each of which is identifiable as a unique individual, and indeed contains bacteria without which they could not continue living. Further, the power of the state *qua* entity is not necessarily identical with the aggregated power of the individuals who comprise it: a state acquires power only to the extent that people agree in nature. The consequences of this proviso will be explored in the next section.

2. Understanding the State as an Individual Mode

I argued in the previous section that the state is an example of the human capacity for creativity in Spinoza's system explained in Chapter 6. It comes into being as a transformative effect of human beings' expression of their inadequate ideas, including the affective content of such ideas. This fact of the state's constitution is no bar to its being an individual mode, although its complexity has consequences for how its power plays out. In this section, I explore the implications of the state's existence *qua* mode. I argue that Spinoza's theory of modes and their affects entails that, while the state's *potentia* derives from its people, it is not identical with the *potentia* of those people, whether collective or

aggregated. I suggest that this appreciation of different dimensions of *potentia* in play within the state opens up a new perspective on Spinoza's political philosophy.

As an individual mode, the state exists in the same way as other modes: that is to say, it expresses the power of substance through both its adequate and inadequate ideas; and it undergoes affections and generates responses to those affections. Undergoing such affections has an effect on its *potentia*, that is, on its power to persevere in being, to affect other modes and to be affected by other modes. Further, like other composite modes, it manifests complex relations within its own being, both among its constituent elements and between those elements and itself, any of which may increase or decrease its *potentia*. In order to appreciate this complexity, each facet of the sketch above – the state's adequate and inadequate ideas; its affections and responses; its *potentia* relative to the *potentia* of its people – stands in need of further elaboration.

A mode can express its power at all only in virtue of the fact that there is an adequate idea of *it*: of its existence as an affection of substance or, metaphorically, the idea of it in the mind of God. So the fact that a state exists at all and seeks to bring about certain effects (commanding obedience) is an expression of its adequate idea. This adequate idea expressed by the state is not identical with either the adequate idea of the totality of its population, or with any of the ideas that they have of it or that it has of itself. Like the human mind, which knows itself only through the idea of its body, the state's self-knowledge is confined to its attempts to bring about certain effects and the success or otherwise of those attempts. This incredibly complex idea is epistemically opaque to both the state itself and its people; the adequate idea of the state, in other words, the expression of its power, can be understood only at a remove, through the effects that it brings about.

This helps to clarify what it means to say that the state can form inadequate ideas. In the first place, as discussed in the previous chapter, inadequate ideas are embedded into process of state formation, as they are in any effect of human creativity. The formation of a state may be motivated by the intention of bringing

about greater security or of binding a group of people together, and achieving these aims requires specific actions on the part of one or more people. Any and all such actions – whether consensus among all the people affected, or agreeing to follow a blueprint from another group which has succeeded previously, or one person imposing their will on others – are expressions of inadequate ideas: perceptions of the current context and possibilities, imaginations of what would improve the situation. Further, like all inadequate ideas, they have affective content: perceptions of need are perceptions of *threat*, thus fearful or timid; imaginations of security are imaginations of *strength*, thus confident or glad. These hypothesised originating ideas, of course, are not ideas that the state has: even in the case where all agree on how to proceed, this is a case of people exercising their natural right, albeit in agreement with each other. But once the state exists, these inadequate ideas and their affective content become embedded and enacted within it, in its own expression of power. While the ideas of people who contribute to decisions and instruments of government are a determining factor in the power that a state has to bring about effects, the power is expressed by the entity that possesses it, state itself. Even the (hypothetical) absolute monarch's effects *qua* monarch are other than her effects *qua* human being.

The state, therefore, originates in inadequate ideas, and the affective content of these inadequate ideas is echoed in its expression of its power. As an existent mode, it is also capable of being affected by other modes, and of forming (necessarily) inadequate ideas of these affections. For example, say a campaign protesting against unequal pay for men and women affects some government such that it forms the idea that it both can and should legislate to equalise pay. In other words, it acts to bring about a certain effect, ensuring that women are not paid less than men for doing similar work, by passing a carefully-worded law. Some years later, it emerges that not only are women still generally paid less than men, but even that women are still paid less than men in the same or similar work. The failure to bring about the intended effect may to some extent be the result of deliberate flouting of the law; but for the most part it is the result of the law being based on an insufficient – inadequate – understanding of the

manifold influences on pay levels, and of interpretation and enforcement of the law that reflects and replicates that inadequacy. The state's enactment of a law which can be obeyed and yet still not have the intended effect is an instance of the state expressing its power through an inadequate idea. Further, this inadequate idea is not the idea of any person, or even any group of people, within the state: the ideas of various individual people no doubt contributed to the formulation of policy and legislation, but the eventual law is a decision or action of the state, expressing *its* inadequate idea.

The fact that a state *qua* mode undergoes affections and responds to them means that we can draw analogies between the behaviours of states and of human beings, for example through the theory of affects sketched out by Spinoza in Part 3 of the *Ethics*. This is not to suggest that states experience the phenomenal affects described there in the same way as people – given that their composition is very different from that of human beings, it would be inappropriate to attribute emotions to them². Rather, the ways in which states undergo affections is such as to potentially diminish or enhance their power and, like any existent mode, they will respond by exercising their *potentia* to preserve themselves. In the case of human beings, Spinoza identifies this exercise of *potentia* in response to encounters with other modes which prompt some affective response. In the case of the state, we can say, first, that the ways in which the state responds to encounters with modes reflect whether such encounters are perceived as empowering or disempowering to it; and second, that traces (*vestigia*) of both its encounters and its responses remain in, and are expressed as, aspects of the political culture of that state.

Just as the human mind, as the idea of a complex object composed of a multiplicity of objects agreeing in nature to some extent, exhibits ways of thinking that cannot be explained through itself *simpliciter* – ways of thinking which are disempowering, and as such injurious to its persevering in being – so the 'mind' of the state can accrue and enact patterns of response which may

² Of course, people who hold power and make decisions as part of the existence of the state do experience such emotions, and the effects of these may well read into things that the state does. Indeed, the desirability of moderating the effect of human emotions on government may be seen as the driving preoccupation of the *Tractatus Politicus*).

come to undermine the purposes for which it was formed, or to thwart the genuine aims of governments. In the case of the state, however, the situation is even more complex than that of the human mind. As the *potentia* of the state is non-identical with the *potentia* of its people, there are multiple dimensions to how *potentia* is present and plays out within the state. This will be explored in greater depth in the following sections of this chapter.

3. The Multiple Dimensions of State *Potentia*

In the previous section I drew attention to the consequences of considering the state as an individual mode. First, *qua* mode there is an *adequate* idea of the state, that is, encompassing the totality of that which the state embodies, enacts and expresses. Second, a state must be understood as capable of forming inadequate ideas, through which it expresses its power to have distinctive effects on people and on other states. Third, a state is an intrinsically complex mode, constituted in part by its institutions, political culture and established practices and in part by large numbers of human beings. In this section, I explore how these features of the state differentiate its *potentia* from the *potentia* of its people. I argue that there are multiple dimensions to *potentia* within the state, all of which can properly be described as the *potentia* of that state; nonetheless, the *potentia* capable of being expressed or exercised by the state's government and institutions is not exhaustive of the totality of *potentia* within the state.

Spinoza's formula for the constitution of the state is that "the right of a commonwealth is determined by the power of a multitude that is guided as though [*veluti*] by a single mind" (TP3.7). If the state is not identical with its people, clearly they are not actually of a single mind; in other words, it is not true to say that the people constitute the state in any simple way. Nonetheless, as Spinoza characterises the state as an entity brought about through people's agreement in nature, it seems that the state's *potentia* must be related to that of its people, even while they retain their natural right. I propose that my framework of reading Spinoza through expression, affect and inadequate ideas offers insight into the realisation of *potentia* in the state as a complex entity composed through partial agreements in nature.

The key is in an appreciation of the relation between the extent of likeness among those who come together to form a combined entity and the increase in power secured by doing so. The argument at *E2p13* stipulates that two modes combining will create one with double the power if they are “of entirely the same nature”. If modes are understood as formed by the affections they undergo and their resulting affects, and as differentiated by the effects they are able to bring about, we can see that it is impossible for complex modes, at least, to be of entirely the same nature. In the case of a person, for example, her various constituent modes are not held together by each partaking in some mysterious fundamental essence of her, or of humanity, but by commonalities in their physical composition and by their ability to achieve effects in concert. As such, the new composite modes they form will not have power equivalent to that of the sum of all the modes involved in their composition. Rather, the power of the composite mode will be some (variable and fluctuating) proportion of that power, corresponding to the extent to which the member modes are the same in nature.

In social formations, the question of what power the new composite body acquires is even more complex and compromised, for people come together according to whatever commonality – agreement in nature – they are able to *perceive* among them, in their given circumstances (*TTP16[15-17]*). Disparate experiences and understandings may mean that whatever social formation it is possible to achieve is based on only a very impoverished idea of agreement and shared advantage, and as such will amount to only an incremental gain in power or improvement on the existing situation. The *potentia* which in principle is present in the creation of a social formation – that which corresponds to the extent of the actual agreement in nature present within a population or group of people – will be only partially realised, because the agreement in nature is only very inadequately perceived, in the face of the affects engendered by encountering one another. Actual social formations, therefore, will not embody and enact the full gain in *potentia* available on the basis of the agreement in nature among the people who comprise them; rather, they will be an expression of inadequate ideas formed by those people, or by some sub-set of them: ideas of

how to realise the benefits offered by joining with others without harming themselves in doing so. In other words, the idea expressed by the state may be several stages removed from the adequate idea of the actual commonality that exists among the people it covers.

The power of the new composite mode, then, is not only a question of how constituent modes *might* combine, given their likeness in nature, but how they in fact *will* combine, on the basis of expression through their inadequate ideas. The state *qua* mode created by human beings' inadequate ideas reflects the limitations on their power of acting that arise from that inadequacy. The first consequence of this is, as suggested above, that the extent of commonality, and the consequent gain in *potentia*, that is realised in a social formation falls short of whatever actual commonality exists among them. The second is that the *potentia* of the totality of people within a state necessarily exceeds the *potentia* enacted by the state itself. In any actual social formation, at any point in time, there are more gains in power available to be achieved, if the present constitution of the social is reimagined so as to enact them. As an example, we can consider a state in which women are denied citizenship or are otherwise excluded from participating in activities which constitute its social, economic and political way of life. In this state, the repertoire of activity available to women is constrained relative to that of men. Assuming that the exclusion does not track some actual difference in *potentia* between women and men³, this means that the *potentia* of the state enacts only a proportion of the *potentia* of its people. If the state were to put women and men on an equal footing, it would realise more of the *potentia* available to it. Or, to use a qualitative rather than a quantitative example, a state which chooses to promote better health for people living within it will generate greater *potentia* within each person; once that greater *potentia* is realised, it is there to be embodied and enacted in enhancing the *potentia* of the state, provided it can be recognised in the right ways.

³ It may be objected that Spinoza thinks that there is in fact such a gender-based difference in *potentia* (TP10.4); I respond that, since Spinoza is subject to the same constraints on imagination as any other person, it is perfectly plausible to think that his perception of women is both largely conventional and highly inadequate. In other words, there is no reason to think either that he has special insight into gender, or that he is capable of an uncompromised application of the logic of his own system.

Thus we can see the actual, constituted state in Spinoza's philosophy as a necessarily partial and provisional entity, distinctive to human beings and defined by inadequate ideas reified in the context of some particular point in social existence. The state enacts all of the *potentia* it has; but there is always more *potentia* available to it. In this, I partially endorse Balibar's concept of the state as a present limit on sovereignty:

The limit implied by the existence of the state...expresses nothing other than the effectiveness of the process by which the state is constituted.
(1985, p31)

My interpretation differs from Balibar's in that I deny the implicit perfectionism in Balibar's interpretations of Spinoza's state as representing a limit just because of the 'effectiveness' of how it is constituted. The state *qua* present, or temporary, limit is indeed a reflection of inadequate ideas of the *potentia* of collective power, but it is not an inadequate version of some optimally 'effective' state which could be constituted in the same circumstances, if only things were otherwise. Rather, it is both the limit of the increased *potentia* which the present state is capable of realising and the means of creating and realising further *potentia*, that is of extending people's power and their ability to enact it, as I explain in the next section.

4. Dynamics of *Potentia* within the State

I argued in section 2 of this chapter that, as an existent mode, the state undergoes affections and responds in ways which express increases or decreases in its power. In this section, I use this insight to explore how Spinoza's mechanisms of affect play out in the state's relations with other entities, with empowering or disempowering results for itself and the people living within it. I argue that the coexistence of differences in *potentia*, that is, the *potentia* of the state itself and the aggregated *potentia* of the people, provides the basis for successive recursive expressions of power which bring about further empowerment or disempowerment. In effect, the constitution of the state *qua* mode provides a means for the creation of further innovative configurations of power and extension or retrenchment of the *potentia* of both state and people.

A state may be affected in different ways. Most obviously, perhaps, its jurisdiction may be challenged, whether at the margins or existentially, by another state power, in the form of a war. In war, each state – whether aggressor or threatened – seeks to express its own *potentia* and to overcome that of the other. It mirrors the situation that Spinoza evokes in Part 3 of the *Ethics* regarding hatred, anger and vengeance:

He who imagines someone to be affected with hate towards him, will hate him in return (by P40) and (by P26) will strive to think of everything which can affect [that person] with sadness, and be eager to bring it to him (by P39). But (by hypothesis) the first thing he imagines of this kind is the evil done him. So he will immediately strive to do the same to [that person], q.e.d..

Schol: The striving to do evil to him we hate is called anger; and the striving to return an evil done us is called vengeance. (*E3p40c2ds*)

Alternatively a state may be affected positively by finding or making common cause with another state, analogous to the processes of reciprocal love, thankfulness and striving to benefit another which Spinoza outlines at *E3p41*. In the first case, the power of the state – indeed, of each state party to the war – is diminished, while in the second it is increased; and in each, acting on the relevant affect tends to have a reflexive and self-reinforcing effect, reifying and intensifying the conflict or common cause and the consequent disempowerment or empowerment, analogously to the affective processes that Spinoza sketches out for human beings in Part 3 of the *Ethics*.

Spinoza, of course, is at least as interested in the ways a state may be affected from within as in the ways other states⁴ affect it. A state is affected from within by the inclination or otherwise of people within its jurisdiction to obey its laws and to uphold the ways of life it promotes; the ways in which it responds such affections thus both express its own power (*potentia*) and bring about further affections in those people, with associated fluctuations in affect and

⁴ The state may also be affected by other socially-constituted external or internal entities, such as large corporations; the Netherlands in Spinoza's time was significantly shaped by the Dutch East India Company (V.O.C.).

empowerment. As in the case of externally-generated affections, the mechanisms of affect play out in ways that can in principle be analysed and understood, with consequences for the power of the state and its people; but the differential extent of the *potentia* of the state, on the one hand, and its people, on the other, gives this process both greater complexity and greater resources for empowerment, than are apparent in considerations of the affective responses of a singular entity *simpliciter*.

The *potentia* of the state as entity may be conceptualised as sited within the totality of the aggregated *potentia* of the people who live within it, even though the two are not identical; this does not mean that the people hold the power of the state, either *de facto* or *de jure*, only that the state has no existence and no power without them. The state expresses its power by bringing about effects such as enacting and implementing laws, and more broadly, by cultivating and supporting some ways of life rather than others. An expression of the state's power, such as making or enforcing some law, or providing some service, brings about affections and responses in people, which may increase or decrease their power; in either case, they may also perceive that their power has increased or decreased, and experience affects of joy or sadness. Significantly, due to the inadequate ideas underlying people's affective responses, it is not a given that such perceptions and affects track the actual change in power. I propose that this outline offers the basis for an understanding of Spinoza's logic of the state, which I develop below. First, I sketch out how the mechanism works in the cases of the unambiguously empowering state and its converse, the clearly repressive state; I then show how the examples of these limit cases may be generalised to shed light on the requirements of political life in Spinoza's philosophy.

If the state is such as to empower people, then their aggregated *potentia*, and indeed the *potentia* each of them enjoys individually, increases. In their experience of this empowerment, they will feel positive affect, including towards the state. This in turn increases the power of the state, as people are motivated to endorse and reinforce the way of life it cultivates. The state whose actions both enhance the actual *potentia* of its people and prompt recognition of their positive effects, will then be in a position to evolve into new and further

empowering ways of life, as gains in *potentia* open up new horizons of possibility and desire. Where people have confidence in the state's use of its power, even apparent challenges – campaigns to change laws or public policy, for example – can act as affirmations of confidence in the state and thus reinforce its power. The *potentia* of the state tracks the expanding *potentia* of its people.

If, on the other hand, the state expresses its power in ways that restrict or diminish the power of its people, such as seeking to rule over minds, then both their aggregated *potentia* and their individual *potentia* decrease.

Disempowerment brings about negative affect manifested in disaffection, reluctant or partial compliance with laws, or civil conflict, all of which weaken the state's *potentia*. The state's power will now be expressed in actions to shore up the effects of its previous actions – measures of enforcement, surveillance and so forth – which will be experienced as further disempowerment. Intensifying the alienation between people and state will reinforce inclinations to non-compliance or generate outright challenges to the extent of state power. The state's restraint of the *potentia* of its people results in negative affects and pressure on its own *potentia*, restricting the extent to which new and empowering ways of life could be created.

Spinoza's use of these positive and negative dynamics may be seen at work in his accounts of the Hebrew state established by Moses for his successors. He describes the institutional arrangements for the state, including a communal basis for political authority, differentiation between lawmakers (interpreters of divine law) and the enforcers of laws, a citizen army sworn to defend the whole state in defending God, and limited exercise of state power by leaders of the tribes (*TTP*17[42-55]). This state embodied and enacted the *potentia* of the free Hebrew people, to the extent that they kept to the rule of Moses and future interpreters of God's decrees. It also created a particular way of life for the people, characterised by the institution and periodic restitution of equal property shares, equality of standing relative to the state, and laws requiring uniformity of practice in religion, work and festivities (*TTP*17[85-91]). Despite this uniformity and requirement for obedience, Spinoza shows that the *potentia* of the state is distinct from that of the people. The *potentia* of the state is

embodied and exercised through its institutions and laws, by those classes of people charged with relevant responsibilities. The people in exercising their *potentia* owe utmost obedience to the law, and are obliged to heed the priests' interpretations of it; nonetheless, "each one was commanded to read and reread the book of the law by himself, continuously and with the utmost attention" (*TTP*17[64]). The people are thus required to exercise their *potentia* in relation to the law in two ways: first, by living in accordance with the law as interpreted by the priesthood; and second, by understanding the law with their own minds.

While the differentiation between legislators and executors, affirmation of the virtues of a citizen's militia and so forth may sound like appeals to the conventional preoccupations of early modern republicanism, Spinoza's account of these features of the Hebrew state is more subtle. First, these institutional arrangements have their origins in Moses's inadequate ideas of the capacities of his people for self-governance, and they will eventually turn out to have destructive, rather than preservative, effects. Second, the injunctions to give obedience to the interpretation of the laws offered by the priesthood, on the one hand, and to familiarise oneself with the book of the law, on the other, are implicitly in tension. As Spinoza exemplifies in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, although the application of one's reasoning always demands obedience to the laws, it is not always the case that application of one's reasoning brings one into agreement with the law; thus the careful study of the law demanded of the Hebrews is likely to give rise to interpretations which conflict with those of the priests. Thus the people's exercise of their *potentia* of the people in the Hebrew state is not only separate from the exercise of *potentia* by the state itself, it also contains within it a potential source of internal dissent and disruption.

For state and people to thrive together, on Spinoza's version of the Scriptural Hebrew state, it is not sufficient that they have agreed to live by God's decrees translated into laws; in order to secure obedience and attachment to those laws, the state must both empower people and be experienced as a source of empowerment: their way of life must be experienced as freedom (*TTP*17[89]). Further, this experience may be misleading: for example, when love of God and their state generates hatred for other peoples (*TTP*17[77-81]), the Hebrews

perceive this hatred as a strength of their state and a form of piety; but on Spinoza's account, it is impossible for hatred to be empowering (*E3p45*). The cultivation of hatred for other peoples stands as an example of the state expressing its power in a way which is intended to be empowering – to enact empowering imaginations – but has contrary effects. In times of peace, the propensity to hatred which consolidated the origins of the Hebrew state is turned against the state itself (*TTP17*[103-104]): the people's hate-driven expression of their own *potentia* ultimately undermines both the state's power and their own.

In real-world political life, of course, the effects of state power and the interactions among states and peoples are complex and multi-dimensional. Questions of who exercises state power, in laws and in their application, will be relevant to whether people are empowered or disempowered, as will the extent of coherence or disparity among the various actions and kinds of actions which can be attributed to the state. Further, it is not obvious that a state's actions will have uniform effects: an increase in the aggregated *potentia* of people within a state is consistent with some people being more empowered than others, and the affective impact of such inequality will have consequences for the state's *potentia* and its ability to bring about further iterations of empowerment. Most importantly, finding the means to greater empowerment is a highly fallible exercise, relying as it does on inadequate ideas – imagining new ways of life and how to bring them about; perceptions of how one is affected by change which may or may not track actual changes in *potentia* – and affective responses to them, on the part of both the state *qua* entity and people who may or may not be involved in the exercise of state power.

Notwithstanding the complexities involved in mapping out political events under this system, it can be seen that exercising state power so as to have empowering effects creates the potential for second-order effects tending to further empowerment, and so on, while exercising state power in disempowering ways undermines the potential for cultivating empowering ways of life. In this, the *potentia* of state and people stand in a relation of concurrence and reciprocity, rather than either identity or opposition. I suggest that this

process of recursion – of the state enhancing its own power by acting in ways that succeed in increasing people’s actual and perceived power, or undermining its own power by acting in ways that diminish people’s power and prompt fearful responses – offers an interpretation of Spinoza under which his political philosophy is unquestionably continuous with both the metaphysics of Parts 1 and 2 and the psychology of Parts 3 and 4 of the *Ethics*. States are transformative effects brought about by multiple human beings; as such, like other existent modes, they are a particular instantiation of Spinoza’s system, subject to the same laws of nature and standing as singular things, better understanding of which enhances our power by bringing us closer to God (*E5p24*). On this interpretation the specific task of political philosophy, for Spinoza, is to provide insight into how far actual political formations and strategies can be understood as instances of the state succeeding or failing to enhance freedom by extending human creativity and power through a dynamic between the *potentia* of state and people. I shall argue in the final section of this chapter that this ostensibly descriptive project does in fact yield normative criteria on which any state may be judged, even though it does not offer criteria for determining legitimacy, either of systems of government or of particular expressions of state power.

5. Defusing Worries about Spinoza and Politics

In the previous section I argued that, in the Spinozistic construction of politics, state *potentia* and people’s *potentia* coexist but are not coextensive, and that this enables a creative dynamic between the two which underlies and explains the stability or otherwise within a state. In this section, I use this model to address philosophical worries from the secondary literature dealing with Spinoza’s political philosophy. I propose that my interpretation of Spinoza is able to detoxify concerns such as the relative power of state and people, the implications of Spinoza’s injunctions to obedience and his denial of a right to resist state authority. Explicating the affective dynamic of state *potentia* and people’s *potentia* helps to draw out the force of Spinoza’s insistence that his philosophy “preserves the natural right intact” (*Ep50*), while acknowledging the realities of state power exercised by institutions or individuals. I argue that Spinoza deliberately avoids creating a theoretical framework which offers criteria for the

legitimation of political power; rather, he looks to understand the processes at work in successful and unsuccessful exercises of such power.

There are obvious tensions in the accounts of politics within Spinoza's works, some of them stated quite explicitly. For example, people have an absolute obligation to obey the laws of a state and the decrees of its government, "even though it commands the greatest absurdities" (*TTP*16[30]). This tension is not resolved or avoided by a reading of Chapter 16 of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* as a critique of contract theories of the state, as Spinoza reiterates people's obligation to bind themselves to obey the law throughout his political writings (*TTP*4[7], *TTP*16[25], etc.; *TP*3.1., 3.3 etc.) and also in the *Ethics* (*E*4p73, *E*4App.XII). Along with this absolute obligation to obedience, Spinoza insists that the right of the state "extends to absolutely everything which it can bring men to do in compliance with its commands" (*TTP*17[5]). To complicate matters further, the injunction to obedience coexists with Spinoza's suggestion that, while everyone in a free state must retain the right to think and speak as they wish (*TTP*20, rubric), certain *thoughts* are by their nature seditious (*TTP*20[20]). Since Spinoza also argues that people cannot control what they think (*TTP*20[8]), this means that people's ability to enact the obedience they owe to the state is always liable to be undermined or compromised. Indeed, the central tension in Spinoza's political philosophy can be seen as that between right and power, both for people and state:

[I]nasmuch as...in the state of nature each is so long independent, as he can guard against oppression by another, and it is in vain for one man alone to try and guard against all, it follows hence that so long as the natural right of man is determined by the power of every individual, and belongs to everyone, so long it is a nonentity, existing in opinion rather than fact, as there is no assurance of making it good. (*TP*2.15)

[The supreme powers] can rightly rule with the utmost violence, and condemn citizens to death for the slightest of reasons. But everyone will deny that they can do these things without detriment to the judgment of sound reason. Indeed, because they cannot do these things without great danger to the whole state, we can also deny that they have the

absolute power to do such things. Hence we can deny even that they can do them with absolute right. (TTP20[7])

[W]e must not infer simply from the fact that a man does something by his own judgment, that he does it in virtue of his own right, and not the right of the state... [W]hatever a subject does which is in accordance with the commands of the supreme power, whether he has been bound by love, or compelled by fear, or (as is, indeed, more frequent) by hope and fear together, whether he acts from reverence (which is a passion composed of fear and wonder) or is led by any reason whatever, he acts in virtue of the right of the state, not his own right. (TTP17[7])

This problematic tension, in its various forms, has prompted some readers to argue that, whatever his motivations and intentions, Spinoza's political philosophy in effect sacrifices the rights of individual people to the rights of states. For example, Sorrell (2008) suggests that in effect Spinoza argues for the state to uphold the rights of people only insofar as they are expressed or enacted according to reason; while Den Uyl (1983) understands Spinoza as subordinating individual right to the advantages of civic peace. Steinberg (2009), while endorsing the view that Spinoza conceptualises the state as the locus of developing human freedoms, understands this as a one-way relation in which the state 'liberates' people so as to ensure that they act "in ways that are consonant with reason and their real interests" (p57) – an interpretation which construes the state more positively than many traditional liberal readings but nonetheless threatens to spill over into an oppressive paternalism directed towards implementing a pre-determined concept of freedoms and interests.

My interpretation, by contrast, by using the framework of expression, affect and inadequate ideas to draw out the dynamic between state *potentia* and people's *potentia*, is able to make sense of the tensions in Spinoza's philosophy and to integrate them into the thesis that any state is a manifestation of efforts to create greater empowerment for people. That some states may aim at the empowerment of some people at the expense of the disempowerment of others, or that gains in power from one time may be lost, or not understood as such, at another, are facts from the history of politics which Spinoza seeks to understand

and from which he seeks to infer general principles of political life, rather than expounding a theory of either the good state or legitimisation of government.

On my reading, the tensions between right and power for states and people are unavoidable just because they express enacted relations among existent modes: between the state and people, on the one hand, and among people within the state, on the other. The obedience owed by people to prevailing laws is indeed a duty, on pain of their not being laws at all; but it is a duty which is always in question, subject to reaffirmation whenever the question of obedience arises. People retain their natural right of thinking and judging in relation to the state, and this may be exercised in compliance with the state – upholding the laws, endorsing prevailing norms – or in creative challenge to the state. Such challenges are the means by which the state is able to extend its own power in a stable way – through its capacity for empowering its people. That they also offer a potential threat to state power, that is, a threat to the state’s ability to enforce its own laws, is simply a reflection of how modes encounter one another: bringing about affections, forming inadequate ideas and responding affectively. Tensions of right and power, between the power of the state to motivate or compel obedience and one’s natural right to judge as one wishes, enacted in varying ways, are built into the existence of the state as the expression of perceived and partial agreements in nature among those who live in it.

Indeed, we may say that Spinoza’s state is constantly re-created through the interplay of expressions of its *potentia* and its people’s *potentia*: people express their *potentia* in their ideas, including their ideas of the state and its laws. The fact that affective responses will be variable, both among different people and for the same person in different circumstances, means that the ideas they form will of necessity be inadequate ideas. These inadequate ideas may be sources of disturbance or sources of further empowerment; indeed, they may be both, since people’s inadequate ideas are the basis of their distinctively human expressions of *potentia*. Thus we can see that the creative thinking processes identified in Chapter 6 can operate in encounters between people and state to bring about the imagining and emergence of new ways of living, either in new fictions or in people’s actions. Obviously, there is nothing to mandate that such

new imaginings will be genuinely empowering: on the contrary, the greater the extent of negative affect associated with the current way of life in the state, the greater the likelihood that new imaginings will be (inadvertently) disempowering, as argued in section 2 of this chapter. And even if new imaginings do offer extended empowerment, it is an open question whether the state will be capable of responding to adapt laws, policies and institutions to accommodate it. Like a philosopher intoxicated by the conclusions of her own best reasoning, a state may provide a cultural and intellectual infrastructure which generates creativity among people without thereby acquiring the capacity to adapt to new realities brought about by that creativity.

The consequences of this unstable dynamic between the *potentia* of state and people can be seen in Spinoza's treatment of the phenomenon of rebellion. On the one hand, this seems entirely straightforward: the only permissible way to seek political change is through engagement and dialogue with those in power (e.g. *TTP*13[29]; *TTP*20[15]); on the other hand, Spinoza also holds the state and people in power responsible for creating the conditions of rebellion, by stifling debate or legislating in bad faith (*TTP*Pref[11]; *TTP*20[29]). Further, rebellion does not necessarily involve overtly political acts: one may be a rebel by failing to care for one's neighbour (*TTP*14[9]) or by knowingly obeying a false doctrine (*TTP*14[20]). Della Rocca (2011) argues that rebels are condemned in Spinoza's political philosophy for failing to make right use of their reason, but this seems problematic, as some of Spinoza's examples of rebellion are instances of reason driving people to rebel. I suggest, rather, that rebellion tracks the phenomenon of state *potentia* failing to adapt to extensions of the aggregated *potentia* of its people. From a practical politics point of view, the rebel is condemned for the same reason as any criminal, because she breaks the state's laws: if she succeeds, those laws either cease to be or have no agency to enforce them, so the parameters for judging the rebel's action collapse, and there are no longer any grounds to condemn her. But the underlying reasons for rebellion are not resolved by this simple formula.

Rather, Spinoza understands rebellion as a situation in which the state fails to reflect the *potentia* of its people. The rebel enacts a contrary position, in that

she acts in accordance with her natural right on the one hand, but against the right of the state, and therefore against the enhancement of her own power, on the other. But the overtly political rebel is only at one end of a spectrum of contrarian possibilities: something similar comes into play on any occasion when someone who lives in the state finds themselves unable to obey the laws to the letter, or cannot suppress the kinds of seditious thoughts referenced at *TTP20*[20]. Such situations seem commonplace: for example, on Spinoza's account, people cannot help but speak and act on their thoughts (*TTP20*[8]), so laws excluding women from public life, criminalising homosexuality or requiring racial discrimination cannot be fully upheld by people who are disadvantaged by them or disagree with them, regardless of whether the laws command the support of a majority of the population. On my reading of Spinoza, where the state is the expression of partial agreements in nature and way of life, the co-existence of contrary ideas and ways of life can be understood as offering greater opportunities and capacities for both state and people being affected in different ways, and thus as providing occasion for enhancing their respective *potentia*. Sovereignty, for Spinoza, is absolute: the state must enforce its own laws on pain of losing its power and harming the power of its people; hence rebellion is never legitimised as such. But what makes a rebel is a person's experience of disempowerment in encountering the state. The best state will preserve itself by being capable of the right kinds of response to the possibility of rebellion and dissent: responding to the underlying reasons for them in productive and empowering ways.

6. Situating the expression-affect-inadequacy dynamic in Spinoza scholarship

The picture of the dynamics of the state that I have developed in this thesis resonates with a growing interest among scholars in how Spinoza's substantive political claims fit within, or may be derived from, the philosophical system articulated in the *Ethics*. In this strand of interpretation, the focus is less on the individual/collective divide explored in Chapter 1, and more oriented towards what it means to live in a state and how such a life relates to questions of freedom. In this section, I locate my reading of Spinoza's political philosophy

relative to recent interpretations which address the relation between the agreement in nature enacted in the state and people's individual freedom present in the state. I argue that my reading of Spinoza resolves some possible issues for these interpretations, and demonstrates the centrality of knowledge as the key to understanding his political philosophy.

Approaching Spinoza's writings from the perspective of autonomy, Armstrong (2017) argues that Spinoza's understanding of human freedom is essentially relational, recognising the need for human beings to enhance their freedom by forging empowering relations with other modes through agreement in nature. On the basis that it is vital for human beings to seek out and enter into such relations, the state can be understood as a genuine source of both individual and collective empowerment, rather than a mere precaution against harm. I agree that it is proper to characterise Spinoza's idea of the state as an arena in which people may live according to agreement, and that such agreements are the outcomes of people's attempts to bring about shared ways of life. Armstrong's reading proposes that agreements among human beings may bring about genuine agreement in nature: "A relation of agreement obtains when individuals are able to act together in the construction of a more powerful, common nature as a condition for the active self-development of each" (p35) and that, as the source of such genuine agreement, the state can be both a source of binding constraint and a means to liberating cooperation and greater autonomy.

With a similar interest in the relation between the state and freedom, Del Lucchese (2009) proposes that we should read Spinoza's political works as exploring the interface between the stable, constituted power manifest in the state's institutions and laws, on the one hand, and the more volatile, constituent power expressed by people within the state, on the other. He develops this theme (2015) to suggest that Spinoza offers a framework in which state power and constituent power offer different perspectives on political life. Unlike political theorists who seek to give priority to either the individual or the state, argues Del Lucchese, Spinoza understands constituent power as both coexistent with and on an ontological par with constituted power in the form of the state: as such, neither can lay greater claim than the other to legitimation or justification

for their actions. Rather, their coexistence and interaction is essential to an understanding of why states succeed or fail: the laws which are the soul of the state are not laws inscribed in its constitution and statutes, but rather the laws governing encounters and relations among modes: “a living power that animates and constitutes the juridical, on both the factual and the normative field...” (p14). On this reading, the state and constituent power are coextensive: if, or insofar as, the state falls short of functioning as a source of or route to (historically-determined) freedom for people, its laws will no longer be supported by their reason and affect (TP10.10) and it will collapse in conflict.

I suggest that my proposal that politics should be considered the locus of a creative dynamic of state and individual power augments both of these readings. With regard to Armstrong’s interpretation, my reading has the advantage of explicating the means by which new relationships of agreement are brought about within and by the state, so providing an appreciation of how even genuine attempts at empowerment may have (or may come to have) unintended and contrary effects. By clarifying the standing of the state as an existent mode with *potentia* of its own, my reading makes sense of Spinoza’s apparent ambivalence about the state: that it is *both* the site of human freedom *and* a context in which people have a duty to comply with laws which they may understand as restricting their freedom. With regard to Del Lucchese’s thesis of constituent power, my interpretation of the dynamic between the state and constituent power shows how Spinoza’s work can account for the state’s responses to pluralism and diversity within the constituent power. A state which is affected by the constituent power in many different ways has the hypothetical means of increasing its power; whether or not it does so will be a question of how it is capable of responding to that opportunity.

More importantly, my reading of Spinoza on politics avoids reliance on an implicit concept of collective agency present in both the interpretations outlined above. Armstrong proposes that, in the good case, the state is the arena in which people can secure power through agreement to seek mutual advantage, and so “...we must strive...to agree with others so as to form with them a more powerful, common nature...” (2017, p35). The formation of such a common

nature, both a greater power and the ultimate source of empowerment for those invested in it, implies that its agency must then take precedence over the agency of individual people. This, I argued earlier, is why Spinoza's thesis of obedience to the state, which applies just as much to slave states as to democracies (TTP17[26], [113]), does not presuppose such agreement among people. Del Lucchese, while recognising that constituent power comprises multiple individuals who may well be in conflict, speaks of it in relation to the state only as a singular entity: it supports, or does not support, the constituted power through reason and affect; it may be cultivated or seized. By arguing that the state *qua* entity embodies what political agreement there is, and by placing interactions between the state and (multiple, diverse) people at the centre of my reading, I avoid questions of collective agency entirely.

Above all, my thesis underlines the importance of contributions from those philosophers who highlight the role of knowledge and knowing as the means in Spinoza's political philosophy through which human beings secure freedom through obedience and cooperation (e.g. Gatens (2009); James (2010, 2011); Rosenthal (1997)). In explicating the significance of imaginative narratives and exemplars for motivating people to recognise and desire new ways of life, these authors show that Spinoza articulates a genuine and radical mode of political philosophy which avoids idealism or dogmatism. I have attempted to provide support for this reading by arguing that such narratives and exemplars stand in Spinoza's philosophy as artefacts brought into being by creative expression: they are effects of human beings' inadequate ideas, reified as fictions which in turn open the way for real changes to how those who encounter them are able to imagine and think about freedom and how to live. On my interpretation of Spinoza, therefore, a focus on knowledge and knowing is not significant only in revealing important aspects of Spinoza's political works; it also shows how the political is a significant element of expression in Spinoza's philosophical system, the expression of human beings' inadequate ideas in efforts towards self-empowerment.

My reading of Spinoza's political writing through expression, affect and inadequate ideas rests on my argument in favour of regarding the state as an

individual mode. Barbone (2010) challenges such an interpretation on the basis that (a) the power (*potentia*) of individuals cannot as a matter of fact be transferred to the state and that, as such, (b) the state is only a “social construct” (p99), with no *potentia* other than that represented by the aggregate of its citizens. I have argued in section 2 that the resources exist in Spinoza’s philosophy to construe the state as an entity in itself: an existent mode which is the expression of partial agreement among the people within its jurisdiction and which has its own *potentia*, grounded in but existing separately from the *potentia* of those people. On Barbone’s first point, therefore, there is no need to attempt to deny *potentia* to the state on the grounds that the creation of such *potentia* would require a transfer of power from individuals; on the second, the aggregated *potentia* of citizens or other inhabitants of the state is certainly not an entity, but nothing about this fact compromises the ontological standing of the state. This should be sufficient to defuse any residual worries about textual warrant for my interpretation of the state as an entity in its own right.

7. Conclusion: Normativity without Political Legitimation

I have argued that Spinoza’s philosophy urges us to understand the state as a distinctive entity, a complex mode grounded in partial agreement among its constitutive modes, dynamically reconstituted and re-imagined in its encounters with other modes external and internal to it. I have suggested that this interpretation captures and makes sense of the obvious tensions within Spinoza’s political writings, and that it shows that tensions of this kind are a necessary and productive element in the existence of the state, arising from fluctuations of *potentia* in it and in its constituent modes. As such, the task of philosophy is to understand both the reasons for tensions and the opportunities they offer for extending *potentia*.

This is not to suggest that Spinoza’s political project aims at description only. On the contrary, there are clear normative aspects to his account of the purpose of the state, the things it should do, and the characteristics of life in a free state. Further, these are not purely prudential or local recommendations: they are intended to be inferences true of states in general, derived by

constructing a natural history of states and inferring general principles of political life from that history, a method similar to that applied in his analysis of Scripture (*TTP*7[6-7]). Whether or not we agree that Spinoza always succeeds in his own attempts at deriving such truths⁵, it seems clear that a suggestion that his political work aims at analysis and description alone would be a misrepresentation.

I have proposed that reading Spinoza's political philosophy as grounded in expression, affect and inadequate ideas brings into view how the ontological status of the state *qua* existent mode generates at least some of these normative prescriptions. As an entity in its own right, the state strives to persevere in being, which means seeking to increase its power: as argued earlier in this chapter, one way for it to do so is to facilitate recognition of agreement in nature among its constituent modes and between itself and them; another is to create new actual agreements in nature available for recognition, through developing shared ways of life. Thus, when Spinoza condemns tyrannical governments, it is for their failure to meet these criteria, by sowing division among people or by seeking to impose untenable restrictions on them. Relatedly, promoting positive rather than negative affect, that is, bringing about shared ways of life which motivate joy and reason, is a means of the state increasing its own power; again, governments which instead rule through fear and superstition are enacting a contradictory position, by attempting to wield state power in ways which weaken the state. The fact that both the existence of particular states as entities and the conduct of government are grounded in inadequate ideas⁶ amounts to a prohibition of absolutism in government, on the grounds that, since both state and government unavoidably involve privation of knowledge, such attempts must necessarily fail, resulting in conflict and disempowerment for all. Above all, openness – to being affected by its own people, by others and by other states – is a virtue of states just as it is an epistemic virtue of people seeking to improve and extend their understanding, since whatever causes a mode to be affected in a greater number of ways is good (*E*4p38).

⁵ *TP*11.4 provides good reasons for questioning whether this is the case.

⁶ See section 4 of this chapter

Such normative principles admittedly do not amount to a set of purportedly universal and timeless standing constraints applicable to all actual governments, the absence of which is the source of much interpretive worry about Spinoza's political philosophy. As we see in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* in relation to true religion (*TTP*14[22-23]), Spinoza holds that universal principles must be principles which everyone can affirm and which no-one can dispute in good faith. Universal constraints on governments, on the other hand, would of necessity be works of the imagination, derived from and appropriate to particular times and circumstances; as such they would involve a privation of knowledge. Further, to constrain governments on the one hand is to legitimise on the other: what is not prohibited is permitted, and what is permitted may be liberating at one time and oppressive at another. Political constraints and legitimation, therefore, like narratives of liberation, are contingent and contextualised; as such, conceiving of them and enacting them is the task of political actors, not philosophers. The place of philosophy is not to endorse or deny such contingent measures, but to improve the knowledge which informs them by providing insight into how the state enables and enhances human freedom, when it does, and why it undermines its own ability to persevere in being, when it does not.

Afterword

Knowing at the Limits of the Political

I began my thesis with the observation that Spinoza claims that the purpose of the state is really freedom. I have argued that freedom is a continuous thread running through Spinoza's philosophy, and that the freedom represented by the state is congruent with the mastery over the affects and blessedness elaborated in Part 5 of the *Ethics*. Indeed, the freedom conferred by living in a state is necessary for the attainment of this mastery and blessedness, because cultivating shared ways of life is an essential element of it. Blessedness for human beings requires living in harmony with other people in social formations, not as a necessary evil but because such social formations are transformative effects of human expression, uniquely reflective of and suited to the kind of beings that we are. Social formations are a distinctively human means of achieving real and sustained increases in our power to persist in being and to become the kinds of people who are capable of using our reason to moderate the affects. The freedom offered by living in a state, therefore, is an essential element in our realisation of the freedom of Part 5 of the *Ethics*, the freedom gained through the power of the intellect.

Even as Spinoza recommends the freedom offered by living in the state he warns that "the people who administer the state or have the rule always try to cover up whatever crimes they commit under the appearance of legality" (*TTP*17[63]), that rulers may command "the greatest absurdities" (*TTP*16[29]) and that "Political Practitioners are thought more inclined to set traps for men than to look after their interests" (*TP*1.2). Yet in the *Tractatus Politicus* he ostensibly takes his guidance from those very 'political practitioners', or at least from the histories of actual states, rather than appealing to what reason alone would suggest. In this afterword, I seek to show that this seeming paradox gives support to my reading of the political writings as showing the pivotal role of knowing in the constitution and reconstitution of states.

The lessons which Spinoza draws from the history of politics in the *Tractatus Politicus* are framed in terms of monarchical, aristocratic and democratic states. The common theme which emerges within his treatment of both monarchy and aristocracy is that good politics has the same aims and imperatives, regardless of what kind of constitution prevails. That is, successful government – that which can maintain the peace and security of a state over time – is government which seeks to make use of the insights and understanding of the people within the state. While the exposition of democracy within the *Tractatus Politicus* is (presumably) unfinished and underdeveloped, mentions of democracy in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* indicate that Spinoza's conception of its advantages is very much along the same lines: that democracies are able to avoid the 'greatest absurdities' of government by the fact that a large number of people and, implicitly, a wide diversity of opinions contribute to the processes of politics.

In the terms of my thesis, this may be understood as Spinoza's development of the theoretical implications of the different *potentia* of state and people into practical lessons for the conduct of politics. The presence of different voices in the political arena allows for different affective experiences of life in the state to be articulated and, at least in principle, to influence those who are constitutionally charged with making political decisions. We may say that the philosophical contribution of the *Tractatus Politicus* is to give political effect to the deployment of a Baconian method of deriving general principles from the systematic observation of relevant phenomena and identification of commonalities among them, as with Spinoza's treatment of Scripture in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*. The political question, then, is how such principles may be put into practice so as to achieve the closest possible alignment between the *potentia* of the state and of the people in particular instances.

On the basis of my interpretation of Spinoza's epistemology as a theory of affective knowing, the difficulties inherent in this project should be apparent. Notwithstanding narratives of sovereignty which locate sovereign power beyond the jurisdiction of the state, the fact is that any person or body of people charged

with making decisions of government will likely be acting from within the state. As such, they will have affectively-charged understandings of what life is like under prevailing political customs and institutions, including affective attachments to established policies and practices and affective aversion to innovation or to learning from other states. Indeed, Spinoza himself may be thought to exemplify such affective epistemic commitments in the *Tractatus Politicus*, for example in determining that judges ought to be at least forty years old (TP6.26)¹ and in his insistence that women are not fit to rule themselves or others (TP11.4).

Affective knowing suggests that a politician – or indeed any person – who stands within a political entity will make political judgements which are shaped by their own experiences of living within that entity, or by the way they have been affected by the experiences of others within that entity. Their understanding of how enhanced or extended *potentia* may be realised within the state will be compromised by the fact that they are situated within institutional and cultural mechanisms which are themselves reifications of previous efforts to increase *potentia* – efforts which, simply by the continued existence of those mechanisms, may be understood as having been successful and which therefore are to a degree self-reinforcing. Affective knowing also makes it the case that solutions to this relative privation of political understanding cannot be found simply by taking counsel outside the state or by following political models perceived to be successful elsewhere. Counsel from political actors in other states will itself be shaped by affects which tend to overstate the advantages of the political arrangements with which their proponents are familiar. Adopting and embedding some specific political practice into the state involves also interpreting its content and adapting it to one's own situation, in the process embedding one's own presumptions within it and potentially losing the very features which made it successful in its original context. Learning the lessons of history means understanding whether and how far one's own state will be

¹ This provision is not otherwise justified, unlike the provision at TP8.15 regarding the minimum age of Patricians.

receptive and responsive to some new law or institution, but it seems that one is never in the optimal epistemic position to achieve such understanding.

This situation of ineliminable privation in our political knowledge is of course no barrier to people forming political ideas. On the contrary, Spinoza's philosophy of mind predicts that we will constantly form ideas of the way of life in which we realise and express our *potentia*. Some of our ideas will be formed in our encounters with the state and with our fellow-citizens, others by encounters with other people's ways of life, as when we travel, or with novel ideas, as when we read, watch films, experience art. engage with social media. And whether in the United Provinces in the seventeenth century or in our own times, those ideas are often communicated both widely and in ways which fall short of Spinoza's injunctions to judge and speak by reason alone and to submit one's judgement to the supreme power while keeping to the law (*TTP*20[14-15]). So the 'political practitioner' is never in the enviable position of Spinoza's hypothesised governments in the *Tractatus Politicus*, of being able to make a holistic and considered assessment of all the evidence regarding the *potentia* of people within the jurisdiction of the state. Nor are conventional ways of thinking about political debate and discourse solutions to this impasse. Vardoulakis (2015) argues in relation to the workings of Spinoza's political theory that, "it is the role of opposition to seek the truth of the law – that is, the law's contingency" (p142). In fact, Spinoza's political philosophy is predicated on the law's contingency. But in the practice of politics, it seems that the legitimised political opposition of democratic process is in no position to play this part, since its exercise is predicated on the very contingent laws in question. Even legitimised protest is liable to be limited in how and how far it will confront the law, since its expressive and epistemic possibilities are at least partly constituted by those laws. On the one hand, legitimised participation is seen as valuable within Spinoza's political philosophy, because it allows political decision-makers to learn something about the emerging *potentia* of the state's population. On the other, such legitimised participation is unlikely to align with that emerging *potentia*: expressed within parameters which are themselves determined by the

state, even opposition will have a tendency to recreate and reinforce the state's own norms.

The rebel who cannot obey the laws², on the other hand, stands at the limit of the political. She may be a rebel by inclination, or by a necessity imposed by her exclusion from the arena of political discourse; either way, her position *qua* rebel sets her outside the limits of legitimised opposition and as such she exemplifies the law's contingency. Someone who cannot obey the law because of what she knows or because of who she is constitutes a demonstration of the contingency and privation of the current laws and institutions of the state relative to the *potentia* of its people. She is therefore also a potential source of insight into those privations, and even into whether and how they might be resolved. Spinoza uses positive exemplars as a source of political insight – exemplars of reason in the *Ethics*, of scripture in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* and of history in the *Tractatus Politicus*. I suggest that the rebel functions as a negative exemplar, a source of political insight into the consequences of a mismatch between the state's *potentia* and actions and the emerging *potentia* of its people.

The rebel does not need to be justified in her actions to function as such an exemplar. Nor is it necessarily the case that she fails to use her reason; rather, she is someone who is differently affected by the laws and institutions of the state, such that her striving to persist in being sets her (partially) outside it. Her existence signals a failure of the state to enhance *potentia* for some of its people, or an opportunity to further enhance *potentia* for all of them. Acknowledging the restricted epistemic perspective imposed by living within a particular created set of institutions and customs should mean also opening oneself to being affected in ways which enable an understanding of the rebel's actions and what they mean. Rather than reacting to the rebel's challenge with a disdain which deprives her actions of meaning (*E3Def.Aff.V.*), or with an indignation which responds to the effects of her actions at the expense of considering their causes (*E3Def.Aff.XX.*), the good politician should recognise that the rebel disrupts the established

² It need not be the case that all rebels fit this description.

narratives and understandings of the state. In other words the rebel acts as a negative exemplar, not in providing an alternative narrative perspective of which the politician needs to take account, but through being an occasion of wonder. She reveals the inadequacy – the incompleteness – of the state’s sustaining fictions. At the revelation of this inadequacy, the imperative on the good politician is to extend her understanding and decide on the best response, rather than simply to reaffirm those very fictions. Political virtues are then shown to be of the same kind as the epistemic virtues of affective knowing: being sufficiently receptive and responsive to new encounters to investigate further and to form and act on new ideas, while also being sufficiently confident (*E3Def.Aff.XIV*) to resist affective impulses to react in harmful ways.

We can therefore see politics as a craft, navigating the horizon of the dynamic of state *potentia* and people’s *potentia* by cultivating the ability to recognise and respond creatively to privations in the current constitution of the state. I suggest that the theme of the *Tractatus Politicus* is that rulers and political decision-makers should seek to achieve this by being open to encounters which do not conform to their own perceptions, rather than by being in successive situations of needing to respond to rebellion. The constitution of a state can support and indeed embody such openness, for example by providing for large advisory or legislative assemblies (*TP6.15*; *TP7.13*) whose composition provides a basis for the state to be affected in different ways so as to exercise an extended repertoire of receptivity and to respond creatively to consolidate and extend empowerment. As previously suggested, the existence of such assemblies as part of the legitimised state apparatus cannot of itself align state *potentia* with the collective *potentia* of the people. However, the more nearly their composition reflects the whole population, and the more their members practice epistemic virtues of receptivity and confident responsiveness, the more nearly it will approximate it. The purpose of the state is freedom; the purpose of politics is to provide a means of rethinking and extending how freedom is understood and exercised.

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